

Mixed Methods Research in Media and Communication Studies: From the Philosophical Framework to Research Designs and Applied Models

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Abstract:

This study seeks to provide a systematic methodological treatment of mixed methods research in the field of media by moving from its philosophical foundations to research designs and applied models. The study is guided by a central research problem: To what extent is the logic of mixed methods research employed in Arab media studies as an integrated epistemological approach that goes beyond the mere technical combination of tools?

In its theoretical dimension, the study reviews methodological literature related to mixed methods research, focusing on its philosophical underpinnings—particularly pragmatism—and the epistemological perspective it advances, which transcends the traditional quantitative/qualitative dichotomy. The review extends to mixed research designs, integration mechanisms, and sampling strategies.

In its analytical dimension, the study examines a sample of Arab media studies that explicitly claim to employ a mixed methods approach, with the aim of assessing their adherence to mixed methods literature in terms of research design, integration logic, sampling construction, and results integration.

The findings reveal a clear disparity between the procedural use of mixed methods and its employment as an integrated epistemological framework. In several studies, tools are used descriptively, with limited methodological integration and weak synthetic interpretation of findings.

The study concludes that advancing mixed methods research in Arab media scholarship does not merely require the adoption of both quantitative and qualitative tools; rather, it necessitates philosophical and methodological awareness of the nature of their integration. Such awareness enables the production of deeper communication knowledge capable of explaining complex media phenomena in the digital context. Accordingly, mixed methods research must be grounded in a rigorous logic of methodological integration rather than simple instrumental aggregation.

Keywords:

Mixed methods research; Media and Communication Studies; Methodological designs; Sampling; Pragmatism; Media studies.

Introduction

Media and communication research has undergone profound transformations in recent decades due to the digital environment, shifting patterns of media reception and interaction, and the

intersection of technical, social, and cultural dimensions in media message production. As Couldry (2012, p. 7) notes, digital transformations have reshaped individuals' relationships with media, compelling researchers to adopt methodological approaches capable of linking quantitative indicators with the meanings embedded in everyday communicative practices. This context has generated a methodological challenge reflected in the limitations of single-method approaches in explaining complex communicative phenomena—whether purely quantitative measurement or qualitative interpretation detached from statistical indicators. In response, mixed methods research has emerged as an integrative methodological orientation that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches within a unified philosophical framework, enabling the study of media phenomena in terms of both measurable structure and socio-cultural meaning. As McQuail (2010, p. 34) argues, media research can no longer rely on a single approach, since communication simultaneously encompasses measurable quantitative dimensions and interpretable symbolic dimensions.

However, the application of mixed methods research in media and communication studies continues to face challenges related to theoretical grounding, methodological design, and sampling procedures. This raises a central question: How can mixed methods research be theoretically and methodologically grounded to ensure its effective application in media and communication studies?

This article addresses this question by analyzing the philosophical foundations of mixed methods research, reviewing its applied designs in media studies, and examining sampling procedures in this type of research, while highlighting its added value in advancing contemporary media scholarship.

Given the growing interest in mixed methods in media research, Creswell and Plano Clark (2018, p. 4) define mixed methods research as “an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data within a single study and integrates the results to provide a richer and more comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation.” This approach is rooted in pragmatist philosophy, which emphasizes selecting tools that best address the research problem rather than adhering rigidly to a single philosophical paradigm (Creswell, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Similarly, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue that mixed methods methodology recognizes the value of both quantitative and qualitative approaches and enhances them through integration, producing more accurate and comprehensive results. This strengthens the researcher's ability to address complex social and media phenomena in a more integrated and in-depth manner.

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach based on theoretical analysis of scholarly literature, employing a methodological analytical grid to examine the nature of mixed designs, sampling strategies, and integration logic. This enables a critical reading of mixed methods practices in contemporary Arab media studies.

Conceptual Definitions

- **Mixed Methods Research:** A methodological approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data within a single study and integrates them at the design, analysis, and interpretation stages (Creswell, 2014).
- **Mixed Designs:** A research strategy that integrates quantitative and qualitative methods within a single study through data integration, sequencing, or using one method to explain the other, allowing for deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2014).

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) define mixed methods as the combination of quantitative

and qualitative elements within a single study to achieve breadth and depth of understanding and to validate findings through multiple methodological approaches.

- **Sample:** The subset of the research population from which data are collected in order to represent the broader population and allow generalizable estimates without studying all elements (Angers, 2013, p. 298).
- **Pragmatism:** A philosophical orientation holding that the value of knowledge is measured by its practical utility and its ability to explain reality and solve problems, rather than strict adherence to a single epistemological system (positivist or interpretivist). In scientific research, it implies selecting tools and methodologies that effectively explain the phenomenon rather than those bound to one philosophical model. Creswell identifies pragmatism as the philosophical foundation of mixed methods research. According to Morgan (2007, p. 73), truth and meaning are evaluated based on their practical consequences and real-world applications in explaining social phenomena.

Study Objectives

This study aims to:

- Provide theoretical and philosophical grounding for mixed methods research.
- Present and classify mixed methods designs, illustrating them with applied examples to assist researchers in selecting appropriate designs.
- Identify key sampling strategies in mixed methods research.
- Examine the limits of applying mixed methods in Arab media research.
- Identify research gaps and shortcomings in application.

First: Theoretical Foundations of Mixed Methods Research

1. Philosophical Background

Media and communication studies have long been characterized by methodological diversity, yet they have not escaped the “paradigm wars” that dominated academic discourse (Creswell, 2014). While some schools emphasized quantitative analysis of media content and effects (e.g., effects studies), others favored qualitative approaches to understand meanings, audience experiences, and media production processes (e.g., cultural and critical studies) (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The complexity of contemporary media phenomena—from the spread of misinformation to the influence of social media algorithms—has compelled scholars to transcend these methodological binaries. Mixed methods research has thus emerged as a “third paradigm,” offering a robust framework for examining such phenomena from multiple perspectives by combining quantitative breadth with qualitative depth (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Mixed methods research responds to the quantitative–qualitative divide by relying on pragmatism as its primary philosophical guide, focusing on the effectiveness of knowledge in explaining phenomena rather than strict allegiance to a single paradigm (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Ontologically, mixed methods assume that media reality is complex, encompassing both objective, measurable dimensions and symbolic, interpretable ones (Papacharissi, 2015).

Epistemologically, it integrates statistical and interpretive knowledge to achieve comprehensive understanding, positioning the researcher as both observer and interpreter (Greene, 2007).

Adopting mixed methods in media studies is not merely a procedural choice but reflects a foundational paradigm that transcends methodological simplification and offers deeper philosophical insights into media phenomena:

- **Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Action:**
In media research, pragmatism enables scholars to select the most appropriate methods to address complex questions about audiences, content, and effects (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Rather than debating whether surveys or interviews are superior, the pragmatic researcher asks: Which approach provides the most comprehensive and in-depth understanding of this specific media phenomenon?
- **Critical Realism and Media Discourse Analysis:**
Critical realism provides a powerful framework for analyzing media discourse. Quantitative methods may reveal patterns (e.g., frequency of certain terms), while qualitative methods uncover underlying mechanisms shaping discourse and its impact on audience perceptions (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). For example, quantitative data may show frequent negative descriptors applied to a particular group in news coverage, whereas qualitative discourse analysis may reveal the ideological structures underpinning this framing and its role in constructing stereotypes.

2. Theoretical Grounding of Mixed Methods Designs

Methodological designs function as a research roadmap, specifying how quantitative and qualitative data are collected, sequenced, and integrated. In media and communication studies, choosing a mixed methods design is not merely formal; it is a strategic decision that determines how quantitative and qualitative approaches interact in explaining media phenomena (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2007).

Mixed designs can be classified into three major categories, with further complex variations.

A. Sequential Designs

Sequential designs involve collecting and analyzing data in distinct phases, where the second phase builds upon the first (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p. 268).

1. Explanatory Sequential Design (QUAN → qual):

The study begins with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative data to explain or deepen understanding of quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

For example, a researcher might conduct a survey examining youth attitudes toward crime coverage on a television channel, then follow up with in-depth interviews to explore behavioral tendencies and authentic perspectives. The qualitative findings provide deeper interpretation of the quantitative results.

2. Exploratory Sequential Design (QUAL → quan):

The study begins with qualitative data to explore a poorly understood phenomenon, and the results inform the development or testing of a quantitative instrument.

For instance, a researcher examining digital privacy management among female Telegram users may first conduct exploratory qualitative research to understand social and technical dimensions of privacy practices. These findings are then used to construct a survey measuring privacy management behaviors on the platform.

3. Sequential Nested Design:

This design is used when one phase (quantitative or qualitative) is dominant, while the other is embedded within it to provide support. For example, a researcher may conduct a large-scale quantitative study on adolescents' patterns of anime consumption to identify their viewing habits and reception patterns. Simultaneously, a small number of qualitative interviews may be conducted with selected adolescents to explore their personal experiences with anime, the

messages they internalized, and how these influenced their behavior. This adds depth to the quantitative findings regarding reception patterns and their behavioral implications.

B. Concurrent Designs

In these designs, quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed simultaneously, and integration occurs during the interpretation stage (Plano Clark, 2010, p. 137).

4. Convergent Parallel Design (QUAN + QUAL):

Quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed independently, and the results are then compared to assess convergence or divergence (triangulation) (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). For example, a researcher examining the construction of social reality in television series may simultaneously conduct a quantitative survey of viewers to assess the perceived ability of television series to shape social reality, while also carrying out in-depth qualitative interviews with producers to understand the criteria guiding their content construction. The findings are compared to determine whether audience perceptions align with producers' practices or reveal discrepancies.

5. Concurrent Embedded Design:

In this design, secondary-method data are embedded within a dominant method during the same research phase (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

For instance, a researcher may conduct a predominantly quantitative study on the impact of digital advertising on purchasing behavior. At the same time, qualitative data—such as eye-tracking measures or brief post-exposure interviews—may be collected to explore consumers' emotional and cognitive responses to the advertisement, thereby enriching the understanding of advertising effectiveness from the consumer's perspective.

6. Concurrent Transformative Design:

Here, quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously, but both phases are guided by a transformative theoretical framework aimed at addressing issues of social justice or media empowerment.

For example, a study on media representation of persons with disabilities may collect quantitative data on the frequency of their representation in media outlets, while also conducting qualitative interviews with individuals from this group regarding their experiences with media portrayal and its impact on their identity. The integrated findings can support arguments for editorial policy reforms to promote equitable representation.

Additionally, media research may employ more complex and multilevel mixed designs.

3. Sampling Strategies in Mixed Methods Research

Sampling in mixed methods research presents a distinctive challenge. The researcher must balance the statistical representativeness required in quantitative samples with the exploratory depth required in qualitative samples. This requires a clear understanding of the sampling logic underlying both quantitative and qualitative traditions.

Sampling types differ according to research objectives. In quantitative research, probability sampling predominates—provided certain conditions are met, such as the availability of a sampling frame and relative population homogeneity. Because quantitative research often aims at statistical generalization, appropriate sampling is essential. Statistical generalizability can only be achieved through probability or random sampling, which ensures that each unit in the population has a known chance of selection. Thus, probability samples are considered representative and allow for generalization to the broader population.

In contrast, qualitative research typically relies on non-probability sampling because its primary aim is in-depth understanding of phenomena—interpreting behaviors, practices, and the meanings constructed by actors within their social contexts. Consequently, non-probability sampling—such as purposive (intentional) sampling or convenience sampling—is most appropriate, since qualitative studies do not seek statistical generalization.

A recurring issue is that some researchers fail to grasp the logic of sampling selection. Sampling refers to the procedure by which sample units are selected, and understanding this logic facilitates appropriate methodological decisions. Probability sampling requires specific statistical conditions that do not apply to non-probability sampling.

Before detailing sampling procedures in mixed methods research, it is essential to distinguish between appropriate sample sizes in quantitative and qualitative research. In quantitative research, sample size is determined through mathematical calculations to ensure representativeness. In qualitative research, sample size is determined by theoretical or informational saturation—the point at which additional data no longer yield new insights. Saturation supports inferential generalization and deep understanding rather than statistical generalization.

In mixed methods research, particularly in media and communication studies, sampling is one of the most complex methodological components. Researchers must understand both quantitative and qualitative sampling logics, as sample selection must serve the objectives of methodological integration (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). It is insufficient to select a representative quantitative sample and a purposive qualitative sample independently; the researcher must also determine how the two will be integrated.

Among the most prominent mixed sampling strategies are:

1. Identical Sampling

Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected from the same participants (e.g., audience members or specific media content), with the aim of deepening quantitative findings or extending qualitative insights (Creswell, 2014).

For example, in a study examining audience attitudes toward media coverage of child abduction cases, a researcher may distribute a questionnaire to 50 participants to measure attitudes, followed by in-depth interviews with the same 50 individuals to explore how these attitudes were formed, which media sources they rely on, and how they interpret media messages. This approach provides integrated understanding.

2. Parallel Sampling

Two separate samples—one quantitative and one qualitative—are selected to study the same media phenomenon. A key characteristic is that the samples do not overlap.

For example, in a study on the construction of developmental narratives in news bulletins, a researcher may select 12 news bulletins for quantitative content analysis, while simultaneously conducting interviews with communication professionals responsible for producing development-related news. The aim is to compare findings from different perspectives (triangulation) or validate results.

3. Nested Sampling

A subsample from the first phase (often quantitative) is selected to participate in the second phase (often qualitative). The goal is to deepen understanding of specific cases or explore reasons for unexpected results.

For instance, in a study on exposure to misinformation on social media platforms, a researcher may conduct a quantitative survey with 500 users, then select 20 users with high exposure levels for in-depth qualitative interviews to explore the underlying causes of their exposure and the types of misinformation encountered.

Other, more complex strategies include multilevel sampling and transformative sampling.

The essence of mixed methods research does not lie merely in collecting quantitative and qualitative data, but in integrating and synthesizing them to produce deeper and more comprehensive understanding of media phenomena (O’Cathain, Murphy, & Nicholl, 2007). Integration may occur at various stages of the research process: during design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation.

Research Methodology

This article adopts a descriptive–analytical approach with a theoretical–applied orientation, grounded in a systematic review of Arabic and international scholarly literature published between 2005 and 2024. Studies were selected based on their focus on mixed methods research in media, including its designs, sampling, and the logic of epistemological integration in the Arab world. A methodological analysis grid was employed to identify: the type of mixed methods design used, the integration logic, the nature of sampling, and the level of integration across findings.

Notably, the use of mixed methods in Arab studies remains limited; most works are confined to theoretical discussion of mixed methods. Nevertheless, a number of applied studies exist, and this article analyzes how mixed methods were implemented in those cases.

The qualitative analysis grid was constructed based on the following criteria:

- **Study type:** theoretical / applied
- **Use of designs:** correct / incorrect
- **Sampling strategy:** clear / unclear
- **Integration stage:** at the design stage / during data collection / at the interpretation stage
- **Findings:** achieve integration / do not achieve integration

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Arab studies addressing mixed methods research in media and communication vary across two main levels:

1) Theoretical Studies

Most Arab studies concentrate on the theoretical dimension of mixed methods without actual field application. For example, Abdullah bin Mohammed Al-Rifai (2024) addressed mixed methods from a critical analytical perspective, presenting research designs, integration tools between quantitative and qualitative data, and the philosophical background of the approach, but without implementing a practical empirical design.

Similarly, Zakaria Drajji (2024) highlighted frameworks for integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches and offered conceptual critique of mixed designs, yet remained within general theoretical analysis.

Badis Lounis (2022) provided an in-depth epistemological analysis of mixed methods in social and media sciences, emphasizing the need to move from *instrumental combination* to *analytical integration* grounded in a solid philosophical foundation; however, the study remained theoretical and did not rely on empirical data.

These works clarify key concepts and provide theoretical justifications for using mixed methods, but they also reveal a gap in practical application within Arab media research contexts.

2) Applied Studies

Applied studies attempt to combine quantitative and qualitative tools within a single design—such as using questionnaires, interviews, and media content analysis—yet multiple methodological shortcomings appear: weak implementation of the design, conceptual confusion

between mixed designs, and poor estimation in selecting appropriate sampling strategies (type and size). In some studies, sample size is insufficient to support representativeness. For example, Khlouf and Azmoty (2025) used a convergent parallel design to study Jordanian university students' engagement with university radio during the shift from traditional FM broadcasting to digital platforms such as TikTok. They integrated large-scale survey data with semi-structured interviews with radio managers, revealing gaps between students' preferences and media content policies. However, the qualitative sample was limited, and the study appears to have selected an unsuitable design; a close reading suggests that, given the reported procedures, the design is closer to an embedded rather than a purely convergent parallel model. Despite this, the study offers a useful applied example for critique and analysis within an Arab environment (Khlouf & Azmoty, 2025).

This kind of limitation underscores the need for more integrated designs in Arab media contexts, representing a clear research gap. On the other hand, Al-Otaibi (2024) employed an embedded mixed design using content analysis to examine cultural values in a Saudi film on Netflix (*Sattar* as a case). This demonstrated the usefulness of mixed methods for capturing symbolic and cultural dimensions that cannot be detected through quantitative counting alone, despite the limited sample and the absence of broader audience perspectives.

Based on the analysis of the selected applied studies, it becomes clear that mixed methods in media research are often used at the level of combining tools, rather than constructing a genuinely integrated design. Khlouf and Azmoty (2025) combine quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, but the analytical integration between the two strands remains limited. The study also does not clearly explain the sampling strategy for interviews or how it relates to the quantitative sample, which weakens the interpretive strength of its conclusions.

Similarly, Al-Otaibi's (2024) study employed a concurrent mixed approach combining quantitative content analysis and semiotic analysis, yet the integration between datasets was not clearly articulated, and selecting only one film as a model reduces the ability to generalize the results. Lounis (2022) offered philosophical and methodological grounding for mixed methods, but the quantitative component was limited to general description without precise measurement tools, and the study did not clarify how results were integrated with the theoretical analysis. Accordingly, while the selected studies provide valuable examples of how mixed methods are applied in media research, they remain observational analyses based on limited samples rather than generalizable conclusions. This is where the present article's added value emerges: it seeks to move beyond the procedural logic of tool-combination toward an intentional integrative conceptualization of mixed methods, by ضبط the relationship between design, sampling, and levels of analytical integration, and by linking results to the philosophical analysis underlying mixed methods. In this way, research shifts from a purely technical practice to a guided methodological and epistemological choice, offering a model for analyzing mixed methods applications in media research on integrated philosophical and methodological grounds.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes that adopting mixed methods research in media sciences is not merely a technical or methodological choice; it requires careful philosophical and epistemological awareness to ensure the soundness and credibility of conclusions. From this perspective, the quality criteria that should be observed in mixed methods research can be summarized as follows:

1. Methodological validity and academic integrity: Researchers must maintain transparency in collecting and analyzing data—whether quantitative or qualitative—while clearly documenting sources and respecting intellectual property (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

2. Representativeness and sample verification: Sampling must be balanced and accurately reflect the phenomenon, with clear articulation of limits and constraints to avoid overgeneralization beyond the scope of the study (Ingers, 2013). Selecting the optimal sampling strategy is essential for research accuracy.
3. Integration and balanced analysis: Quantitative and qualitative integration must be conducted methodologically so that each strand complements the other. Each indicator should be interpreted within the cultural and symbolic context of media messages, and the researcher must recognize that integration should align with the selected design (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013).
4. Ethical and normative compliance: Respecting participants' rights, protecting privacy, and avoiding practices that conflict with ethical or religious/normative standards within the society—thereby ensuring research integrity and credibility.
5. Transparency of findings and limits of inference: Results should be presented in a way that reflects sample size, study scope, and degree of methodological integration, with explicit acknowledgement of limitations and boundaries of generalization to other contexts (Greene, 2007).

By adhering to these criteria, mixed methods research can generate complex, accurate, and balanced knowledge that combines quantitative measurement with qualitative interpretation, while maintaining ethical and normative integrity. At the same time, mixed methods studies remain constrained by the samples used and designs adopted, which necessitates continued methodological development and more comprehensive integration between both strands in future media research.

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