PREFERRED APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN NIGERIA: THE SCHOLARS' PERCEPTION.

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Abstract

This study examined the perception of communication scholar on their preference of communication research approach with the objectives to: ascertain the type of research approach communication scholars adopt in scientific research, and know what influences or stimulates the choice of the research approach adopted by communication scholars. The study adopted survey design as means of investigation. Online questionnaire was structured for data collection. Census was adopted for the study where 28 respondents who are lecturers were drawn from Fountain University, Osogbo, Redeemer's University, Ede, and Osun State Polytechnic, Iree. Study revealed that mass communication scholar adopts mixed-method in their approach in addressing communication research as survey was revealed to be the most adopted design; and that communication scholars' preference for a research approach is often determined by the nature of research a scholar is embarking on for easy comprehension of data collected. It was recommended therefore that scholars should continue to encourage one another to continually adopt the mixed-method approach with other designs such as KAP, FGD etc.

Keywords: Communication Research, Mixed-method, Qualitative Research, Quantitative research, Scholars

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, studies have indicated a significant and cordial association between national growth and academic study all over the world. According to Okokpujie, Fayomi, and Lerano (2018), the use of analysis in financial activities helps to improve financial development, which leads to national advancement. These experts went on to say that research generates innovation, which is the real driving force behind today's economic, political, social, and religious advancement. In other words, the kind of progress that the world is experiencing now in terms of science and technology is rooted in research from the pure, applied, and social sciences.

According to Park, Bahrudin, and Han (2020), research is "the search for knowledge, involving a systematic analysis of many aspects of the world focusing on the discovery, interpretation, correction, and reconfirmation of information," citing Oxford Dictionary (2020). In other terms, research is a very detailed investigation into matters concerning human existence. According to this definition, many view research as merely a process of acquiring and evaluating data, but Williams (2007) claims that the "process" is systematic since it requires knowing what objective(s) is related to one's curiosity about the topic under inquiry. Research, on the other hand, cannot be separated from knowledge

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because research tends to improve knowledge. Knowledge, on the other hand, is frequently the catalyst for research questions that, in turn, lead to societal growth. To this purpose, all knowledge, regardless of classification, is either empirical- posterior knowledge or non-empirical-priori information, resulting in human society's growth (Williams, 2007).

Scholars have had to use one of three sorts of research approaches to address a specific issue when doing developmental study around the world: quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method. Nonetheless, a scholar's choice of approach is influenced by a variety of factors, including theoretical, practical, and ethical considerations (Thompson, 2016). However, when deciding on a research approach, researchers are aware that whatever method is used to conduct an investigation must adhere to scientific procedures, which are often stringent, because it is widely assumed that there is little new under the earth to be investigated, necessitating the need to identify the gap that a study will fill in relation to previous research.

Studies on quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research methodologies have demonstrated that different types of scientific inquiry have their own set of drawbacks and disadvantages, regardless of how scientific the conclusions of a phenomenon may be. More specifically, Abdullahi, Senekal, Zyl-Schalekamp, Amzat, and Saliman (2012) stated that academics all around the world have regularly used quantitative research to solve health and medical challenges. However, in the current health phenomenon, the need to start pushing for a qualitative and mixed approach has continued to dominate arguments. However, this argument leads to the realization that this is frequently the case in many other domains, such as mass communication. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate communication scholars' perceptions in their respective fields. The goal of preferring a research approach is to figure out which of the three approaches is more frequently used to solve problems in communication research.

Research Objectives

Drawing from the views presented above, the objectives of this study are:

- i. To ascertain the type of research approach communication scholars adopt in scientific research.
- ii. To know what influences or stimulates the choice of the research approach adopted by communication scholars.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the concept of communication research

The word "research" comes from the French word "researcher," which was developed from the old French word "recerchier." This word simply implies to do a thorough investigation or to search repeatedly (Tejumaye 2003). In a word, research is the application of scientific methodologies to the study of a certain event, behavior, or circumstance. According to Obikeze (2012), research is a methodical, well-structured, and objectively motivated hunt for knowledge to support or refute a certain phenomenon's thesis. Research is described as an inquiry of an issue using established procedures with the goal of finding answers or solutions to a well-defined problem (s).

Thus, with a basic understanding of what research is, communication research is a form of study that examines the role and functions of the media or a country's

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communication structure. It focuses on the structure of the media, the influence of content, and the application of a country's communication pattern, as well as how they relate to other disciplines. According to Wilson, Esiri, and Onwubere (2008), communication research entails using scientific methods to investigate the role and application of mass media. Because communication research is not conducted in isolation, this term is justified. Other fields of study are intertwined with communication research. Other social and scientific investigations, for example, have a human perspective, and everything with a human perspective has since humans cannot survive without communication, there is a communication perspective.

According to Wilson, Esiri, and Onwubere (2008), communication research covers topics such as media functions, media messages and origins, functions and objectives of media messages, media audiences, effect of media messages, feedbacks and noise, media ownership, regulation, and communication channels. Communication study also looks into, identifies, investigates, and measures the various aspects that can affect communication. It could also be theory-driven and based on empirical evidence. One of the most intriguing aspects of communication study is that it allows communication academics to analyze how much emphasis has been placed on communication and human Communication research can also be seen as a qualitative and connection. quantitative research method adopted in a research about a communication phenomenon. It assist to uncover various pattern in communication behaviour especially in media audience, as well as enable communication scholars generate useful communication theories. Communication research helps to translate complex findings into a context that can easily be understood. It is essential in solving problem. Unlike other disciplines communication research transforms raw research findings into something that can address the needs of the public. It can have important and timely information that could be of relevance to policy makers or government.

Approaches in communication research

Research approaches in communication research are written out plans and procedures for conducting a study that cover the processes from a general premise through well-detailed methods of data generation, collecting, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell 2014). The ability of the researcher to identify the appropriate approach to be employed to examine a topic is one of the decisions involved in research approaches. According to Creswell (2014), a researcher's philosophical assumptions, method of inquiry or study designs, and recognizable research methods for data collection, analysis, and interpretation impact this decision. Similarly, the nature of the study problem or issues under consideration determines the research approach.

Although the definition of research approach has been established, it is still required to discuss the various sorts of research approaches used in communication research. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies approaches are available. To begin, qualitative research is a type of study that focuses on gathering information through open-ended questions. This method looks into not just "what" people think, but "why" they think that way. This method also entails gathering, evaluating, and interpreting text or non-numerical data such as audio, video, and text in order to learn about the thoughts, concepts,

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and experiences underlying the items under investigation. The goal of qualitative research is to learn about the various interpretations people have of a societal or personal situation. The majority of the time, data is collected from the participant's environment in order to have a better understanding of the participant's behaviour. (Creswell 2014).

The process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting numerical data is known as quantitative research. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research aids in the identification of patterns and averages, as well as the making of forecasts, the testing of casual links, and the generalization of results to a larger population. Correlational, descriptive, and experimental research are the most common applications of the quantitative approach. Similarly, this method is used to test objective ideas by looking at the correlations between variables (Creswell 2014). As a result, these variables can be monitored with an instrument, allowing for statistical analysis of numbered data. According to Creswell (2014), the final copy of the report in a quantitative approach consists of an introduction, literature and theory, methods, results, and discussion. Researchers that take this technique to communication frequently have a preconceived notion about what they're looking for control alternate explanations, generalize and reproduce findings, and test hypotheses deductively while also generalize and replicate findings (Creswell 2014).

In communication research, a mixed method approach is used when researchers generate, analyze, and interpret quantitative and qualitative data in the same study. By its very nature, this approach may answer a variety of queries and aids researchers in providing in-depth results to a problem. By adding better evidence to conclusions, a mixed method approach can also balance out weaknesses in a study. Creswell (2014) claims that combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies allows for a thorough understanding of the study problem.

Empirical Studies

The findings of this study are relevant in terms of the utility of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies in studying problem-solving skills in communication research. However, the study did not provide the best way for examining problem-solving skills in communication research. The study also didn't go into detail on how each research approach contributed to the study of problem-solving skills in communication research. These are concerns that need to be researched further.

The study aimed to critically examine the strengths and shortcomings of two major research paradigms in education qualitative and quantitative. It might be argued that the study accomplished its goal because it focuses on the critical demonstration of the merits and drawbacks of various research methods and approaches, as well as ethical considerations.

The advantages of using qualitative research in language testing and assessment research include gaining a deeper understanding of how to design, administer, and interpret language assessment, understanding candidate behaviour during speaking tests, understanding the meaning of the score or grade., as well as the complexities of language evaluation There are, however, some limitations: The results can be distorted when the sample size is tiny. Policymakers may not seek qualitative research. The study, on the other hand, identified the advantages of using quantitative research in language testing and

assessment research, such as a larger sample size and characteristics that make testing research more reliable. However, there are certain disadvantages: Quantitative research ignores the meanings and effects of a system that is uninterested in the intricacies of variables, such as a testing system. Furthermore, the study discovered that, due to its broad use by researchers all over the world, quantitative research is the most widely utilized method in language testing and evaluation research. The benefits and drawbacks of numerous research techniques and approaches, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of various research methods and approaches, have been discovered by the study. The study found that ethical issues related to research projects are increasingly essential nowadays, but that there are no concrete guidelines for judging whether a research technique or method is ethical or not. The study appears to have focused on the topic's most pressing challenges; yet, due to the extensive scope of research techniques and methods, a small study of this size cannot address all of the issues. As a result, future research will be required.

This second study uses a plane mirror to evaluate conceptual learning from quantitative problem solving, with a focus on conceptual comprehension and content analysis. This research is based on Ausubel's (1968) notion of problem solving as a type of meaningful learning. In terms of comprehending human experience, the piece is considered phenomenological research. The researchers employed interpretative and interactive approaches with a small group of participants because they were the primary data collectors. According to (Johnson and Christensen, 2012, p34-35), the research demonstrates qualitative research approach features. Figures like "30%, 20%" were used in the discussion, indicating that the positivist approach was superior to the constructivist one (Maxwell, 2013, p29-30). The limitations of qualitative research in terms of consistency and reliability (Bryman, 2008, p394). To make forecasts, they used terms like "approximately 20%, about 30%" in their discussions. The research objectives and hypotheses that lead to the study were not formulated, but the process was thoroughly detailed. This research backs up Litchman's allegation (2006, p9) that no qualitative investigation was conducted to evaluate the premise. The researchers made no mention of the control or validation of factors in the equipment they employed. The analysis is descriptive, and the study's overall substance is minimal in comparison to the preceding one.

The third review concerns Chun Yen and Barufaldi (1999) report on a Quantitative Study of a problem-solving-based Teaching Method for Earth Science Junior High School Students. The quasi-experimental method was used with an emphasis on observation, measurement, and statistical analysis that characterize the objective nature of social research. Data was collected from a sample of 172 students using questionnaires, academic achievement tests, and surveys, but the researchers did not explain how to select the sample. The parties to the research were researchers, teachers, and students. In contrast to qualitative research, where researchers treat students directly, researchers treat students through teachers here. The authors gave a detailed explanation of the methods and procedure adopted for the research. Variables in the study were explained but neither research question nor hypotheses were stated, which does not agree with an objectivist view of social research outlined by (Lifchman, 2006). The research still agrees with Bryman's (2011) view of quantitative research which states that 'quantitative research does

not entail the specification of a hypothesis`. Covariance and chisquare were used for data analysis. Consequently, chisquare was used to test an alternate hypothesis which was not stated at the beginning. Researchers emphasized validity and independent variables. Discussions and conclusions were reached, but no restrictions or suggestions for future research were presented. There is no doubt that this study falls into the realm of positivism. This study essentially deals with the decisive importance of communication research for government and sound theoretical principles and processes, and gives a brief theoretical overview of communication research. The term communication research is defined and briefly describes different types of research. The survey process is accompanied by a brief description of the steps in the survey process.

The final overview examines how researchers in different disciplines use qualitative and quantitative research methods and approaches in their research. The study further states that some of these researchers prefer to be called qualitative researchers. Others like to be seen as quantitative researchers. Therefore, research work is highly polarized. And they take part in the competition, where they show the benefits of their own preferred methods and approaches. However, both methods and approaches (qualitative and quantitative) have their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, this study explores the strengths and weaknesses of using qualitative and quantitative research approaches and methods in language testing and evaluation studies. At the end of the study, some of the advantages of using qualitative methods for the "Language Evaluation and Testing" study were pointed out. Explore the behaviour, perceptions, emotions and understanding of the test taker.

Theoretical framework

Theory is a statement of prediction based on an individual's viewpoints about an aspect of reality. In the field of communication, theories are set of ideas which make provision for an explanation of communication phenomena. Therefore, this study is grounded on two theories: Expectancy Value and Perception theories. The Expectancy Value theory was developed by Jacqueline and Wingfield (2002). The essence of the theory is to provide explanation and predict people's attitude towards an object or actions. According to Jacqueline and Wingfield (2002), expectancy portrays the idea that majority of people will not engage in any action if the envisage any sign of failure. Also on the concept of value, Jacqueline and Wingfield (2002) mention that value represent the different beliefs people have about any task/action they want to implement. This theory's component encompasses: belief, value and expectation.

The applicability of this theory to this study is based on the premise that first, communication researchers can decide to adopt any of the research approach listed above (Qualitative, Quantitative or mixed method) for their research by developing a belief about the chosen approach. If the belief already exists it could result to new information. Secondly, communication researchers could assign value to the chosen approach based on their belief and lastly, researchers could get expected result based on their belief and value for adopting a particular research approach.

In a nutshell, this theory assumes that achievement is based on individual's choice of action usually motivated by expectations and the value attached to such action or task. Therefore, factors like beliefs, previous experiences, goals, expectations and

environmental influence could also shape the choice of research approaches by communication researchers. The theory highlighted the importance of competence to achieve success, hence, this research strongly supports the assumptions of this theory.

Another theory found relevant to this study is the perception theory. According to Rao and Narayana (1998), the theory assumes that perception is the act of being aware of something or person being aware of his/her environment through physical sensation which has to do with a person's ability to understand perception. Rao and Narayana (1998), described perception theory as an individual's ability to interpret information about a thing and the opinion an individual has about a thing depends on the amount of information available and the extend individuals can correctly interpret the information acquired. In other words, a person can have access to the same information and still arrive at different conclusion as a result of differences in information interpretation capacity.

Furthermore, the theory assumes that sensory information process in people's cognition such as recognition, memory; perception and comprehension are organized and shaped by previous experiences and expectations. Rao and Narayana (1998) maintained that perception theory encompasses the process people select, organize and interpret information in their environment. For instance, researchers could attempt to understand their environment by data gathered. Also the perception researchers have about the various research approaches could guide them to harness and channel relevant information towards fulfilling perceived requirement.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This design adopts quantitative research approach in probing into the phenomenon. Survey design is deployed to seek data from respondents of the three institutions under investigation.

Study Population

The population for this study is a total of 28 comprising only academic staff members of three institutions: Redeemer's University, Ede; Fountain University, Osogbo; and Osun State Polytechnic, Iree. This is therefore presented in the table below:

S/N	Institution	Number Teaching Staff
1.	Osun State Polytechnic, Iree	10
2.	Fountain University, Osogbo	10
3.	Redeemer's University, Ede	8
	Total	28

Source: Department of Mass Communication, Redeemer's University, Fountain University, and Osun State Polytechnic, Iree, 2022

Sample Size/Technique

This study's sample size is the total population, which are 28 people. Because the population is small enough to address the investigation, the census method is used. Ifeagwu (2012), on the other hand, says that census can only be used when a researcher can accommodate for the complete population based on its number because data is collected

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from every member of the community. As a result, census is justified because the population is small enough for the researcher to handle.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Presentation

Consequent upon the online survey conducted, 28 respondents were expected to fill the online questionnaire. However, 15 of the 28 respondents attended to the online survey leaving 13 unattended to. To this end, the 15 online questionnaires were used in the analysis and proven valid for this investigation.

Section A: Demographic Data

Table 1: Response on Staff Category of Respondents

Staff Category	Frequency	Percentage
Junior Lecturer	10	67%
(Ass. Lec.3,2,1)		
Senior Lecturer	5	33%
(Above Lec.1)		
Total	15	100%

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2022

Table 1 shows responses of respondents on category of staff members. It thus revealed that of the 15 respondents 10 (67%) were junior lecturers who are assistant lecturers, lecturers 3, 2, and 1 while 5 of them are senior lecturers who are above lecturer 1. Therefore, it shows that majority of respondents are junior lecturers.

Table 2: Response on Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	9	60%
Female	6	40%
Total	15	100%

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2022

Table 2 above shows the response of respondents on gender. It is noted that 9 (60%) of respondents are male, and 6 (40%) were female. Therefore, it is clear that majority of respondents are male.

Table 3: Response of Respondents on Years of Experience as Lecturer

Year of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
1-10 years	8	53%
11-20 years	5	33%
21 years and Above	2	14%
Total	15	100%

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2022

Table 3 shows the response of respondents on years of experience as lecturer. It is noted that 8 (53%) of respondents have been a lecturer for 1-10 years, 5 (33%) have been lecturing for 11-20 years, and 2 (14%) have spend 21 years and above as lecturer. Therefore, the table reveals that majority of respondents are lecturers with 1-10 years of lecturing experience.

Table 4: Response on Institutions of Respondents

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Institution	Frequency	Percentage
Redeemer's University	6	40%
Fountain University	5	33%
Osun State Polytechnic	4	27%
Total	15	100%

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2022

Table 4 above reveals responses of respondents regarding their institution. Therefore, 6 (40%) of the respondents were from Redeemer's University, Ede, 5 (33%) of them lecture at Fountain University, Osogbo, and while 4 (27%) are lecturers at Osun State Polytechnic, Iree. Consequently, the table shows that majority of respondents are lecturers from Redeemer's university, Ede.

Section B: Psychographic Data

Research Question 1: What type of research approach do communication scholars adopt in scientific research?

Table 5: Which of these research approaches do you prefer in conducting research as communication scholar?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Qualitative	4	27%
Quantitative	4	27%
Mixed Methods	7	46%
Total	15	100%

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2022

Table 5 reveals the response of respondents on the type of research approach respondents prefer in conducting research as communication scholars. It however showed that 4 (27%) of respondents chose qualitative, 4 (27%) chose qualitative, while 7 (46%) chose mixed methods. This means that majority of respondents prefer mixed methods in conducting research as communication scholars.

Question 2: Base on your preference of approach, kindly state the particular research design you often deploy in carrying out your research work, e.g Survey, KAP etc.

Sequel to this question, responses of respondents reveals that majority of mass communication lecturers deploy survey design in carrying out their research work, this do not also rule out the fact that some lecturers also deploy other designs such as content analysis and Key Informant Interview.

Table 6: Which research approach do you think communication scholars are used to in carrying out their research?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Qualitative	4	27%
Quantitative	5	33%
Mixed Methods	6	40%

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Total 15 100%

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2022

Table 6 states the response of respondents on their notion of the kind of approach most communication scholars often adopt in addressing their research work. To this end, 4 (27%) of respondents chose qualitative, while 5 (33%) chose qualitative, and 6 (40%) chose mixed method. This implies that majority of respondents are of the notion that most communication scholar adopts mixed method in addressing their research work.

Research Question 2: What influences or stimulates the choice of the research approach often adopted by communication scholars?

Question 4: Sequel to your preference of approach stated in question 1(1), kindly state reason for choice of research approach.

Majority of respondents are of the notion that they adopt their research choice of approach because they find it convenient so far such approach suites the phenomenon under investigation. This however serves as or stimulates the bases for choosing a particular research approach amongst mass communication scholars.

Question 5: what is your reason for choosing the research approach considering other approaches as stated in Q1?

Resulting from this question, responses reveal that many communication scholars enjoy adopting their research approaches because most of them are used to that approach they chose due to the fact that they find those approaches comfortable; easy to analysis and interpret data collected which help to create better understanding of results.

Table 7: On a scale of 1-4, how much do you think your research works have adopted or reflected your choice of research approach?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Lowest)	1	7%
2 (Low)	1	7%
3 (High)	3	20%
4 (very High)	10	66%
Total	15	100%

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2022

On a scale of 1-4, table 7 shows the notion of respondents on how much their research works or publications have reflected their choice of research approach. This table reveals that 1 (7%) of respondents chose 1 (lowest), 1 (7%) chose 2 (low), 3 (20%) chose 3 (high), 10 (66%) chose 4 (very high). To this end, this means that majority of respondents' are of the notion that their choice of research approach reflects their research works on a very high level.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What type of research approach do communication scholars adopt in scientific research?

Drawing discussion from table 5, item 2, and table 6, it was revealed that scholars in mass communication prefer mixed methods to both qualitative and quantitative methods.

However, this of course means that both qualitative and quantitative methods are mostly deployed by mass communication scholar in addressing phenomena in the field of mass communication. However, the Survey design has been very prominent with communication scholar, although Key Informant Interview and Content Analysis were also adjudged to prominent in conducting research enquiries. This, to a large extent explains the general believe that communication scholars prefer mixed method approach to addressing communication research. To this aim, Ojebode, Ojebuyi, Oladapo, and Oyedele (2018) suggest that "a mixed-method research strategy provides multiple and more credible sources of evidence, leveraging the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms in finding answers to societal problems." The finding on research question one, on the other hand, contradicts Abdulahi, Senekal, Zyl-Schalekamp, Amzat, and Saliman (2012)'s need for qualitative research in addressing culturally linked concerns in relation to health and modern health challenges. To put it another way, the communication research environment has shifted from a request for a specific strategy to the use of hybrid approaches to address social and scientific phenomena.

Research Question 2: What influences or stimulates the choice of the research approach often adopted by communication scholars?

Consequent upon research question 2 as drawn from items 4, 5, and table 7, investigation reveals that the choice of communication scholars on their approach is mostly determined by the kind of research a scholar is embarking on or investigating. More so, this approach is mostly influenced by the researcher's particular love for an approach. The love for this approach is however motivated by simplicity of the approach in term of showing clear interpretation, analysis that reveals clear understanding of data. Therefore, communication scholars are confident enough that mixed-method approach dominates communication research approach on a very high level. In other words, study states that many communication researches reflect the adoption or preference for mixed-method approach.

CONCLUSION

On the one hand, several fields of study have argued that quantitative research has dominated research in this sector, prompting calls for a transition to qualitative and mixed research methodologies. In communication research, on the other hand, similar debate has erupted among researchers and, in particular, communication students. To that purpose, this study examines communication experts' perceptions of their preferred approach to communication research in order to determine the exact approach, design, and motivating cause for research choice. As a result, the study was able to demonstrate that communication research has shifted from a single methodology, such as qualitative or quantitative, to a mixed-method approach. This paradigm reveals the reality that media workers are experts in their field. Through the agenda-setting hypothesis of the media scholars are policy formulators, recognizing that most communication research aids in policy formulation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the various result, it is expedient to recommend the following that:

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- 1. Communication scholars should continue to encourage one another to employ mixed-method research since it will help to broaden the scope of understanding of research phenomena because different approaches will yield diverse data, resulting in better compression of research topics.
- 2. Scholars should begin to use different designs, such as Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP), Focus Group Discussion, and others, to help broaden communication views.

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