



---

## EXPLORING THE LINKS BETWEEN THEORY AND RESEARCH IN SOCIOLOGY

**Abdulkarim Umar**

School of General and Remedial Studies  
The Federal Polytechnic Damaturu, Yobe State, Nigeria  
Email: [abdulkarimumar12@gmail.com](mailto:abdulkarimumar12@gmail.com)

---

### ABSTRACT

This scholarly article employs a review approach to examine the complex connection between sociological theory and research, highlighting their mutual reliance on comprehending social phenomena. Sociological theories function as conceptual frameworks that explain society's functioning by categorizing patterns, connections, and fundamental structures. Furthermore, these theories not only stem from actual findings but also direct the development of research questions and hypotheses, which are crucial for efficient study design and data gathering. This work emphasizes the essential role of research in the process of theory development, as it involves the testing, refinement, and provision of evidence for both established and novel hypotheses. The dynamic nature of this process ensures that ideas remain relevant and have a solid foundation in empirical reality, influencing future research investigations. This paper explores many sociological theories, including social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, and feminist theory, to demonstrate how these frameworks shape research and enhance comprehension of social structures and interactions. Moreover, the study argues that theory and research are interdependent and integral for understanding the intricacies of the social world. We advise investigators to prioritize theory-driven research.

**Keywords:** *Hypothesis, Links, Research, Sociological, Theory*

### INTRODUCTION

The links between theory and research in sociology is intricate and interconnected. Theory provides sociologists with a framework and a lens through which to view and understand the social world. It helps them to develop hypotheses, guide their research questions, and make sense of their findings. On the other hand, research allows sociologists to test and refine theories, validate or invalidate hypotheses, and produce

new knowledge about society (Gelles, & Levine, 2017). Sociological theories are abstract, general explanations of how society works, and they aim to explain social phenomena by identifying patterns, relationships, and underlying structures. These theories are often based on concepts and ideas derived from previous research, empirical observations, and the interpretation of social phenomena. They serve as a foundation for research by providing a framework that guides the collection and interpretation of data (Bryman, 2016).

Research in sociology involves the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data with the goal of generating knowledge about social phenomena. It involves studying individuals, groups, or societies and their behaviors, attitudes, and relationships. Sociological research can take on various forms such as surveys, experiments, interviews, participant observation, content analysis, and statistical analysis. Through empirical investigation, sociologists gather data to either support or challenge existing theories or to develop new ones (Macionis, & Plummer, 2018). The relationship between theory and research in sociology is cyclical. Sociologists use theories to generate research questions and hypotheses, which then guide their research design and data collection methods. The findings from research can validate or refute existing theories or generate new theoretical perspectives. These new or modified theories, in turn, shape future research questions and guide subsequent investigations.

### **The Problem**

This study investigates the ways in which theoretical frameworks shape empirical research procedures, as well as the consequences of these relationships for contemporary sociological comprehension. Certain researchers engage in empirical or non-empirical research without fully grasping the necessity of using a theoretical framework, thereby impacting the overall quality of the research. The objective of this review is to examine the interaction between well-established sociological theories and the structure of research projects, emphasizing how these connections influence our understanding of social phenomena. Moreover, it is crucial to comprehend that theoretical viewpoints hold the power to both limit and enrich the research process, eventually shaping the analysis of data and the generation of novel sociological understandings. The present study examines the significance of interdisciplinary methodologies in enhancing sociological theory and

practice. It highlights the potential of effectively incorporating many theoretical viewpoints in empirical studies to produce strong research outcomes, particularly within the field of sociology. Through these kinds of efforts, it hopes to show that partnerships can lead to new ways of doing things. This will expand the field of sociology research and help people understand complex social processes better.

### **Methods**

The paper employs a review approach to investigate the intricate relationship between sociological theory and research. The primary method utilized in this study is a comprehensive review of existing literature. This approach allows the authors to synthesize various perspectives on the interplay between theory and research in sociology, providing a broad understanding of the topic. Thus several sociological theories, such as social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, and feminist theory were explored. By analyzing these frameworks, the authors illustrate how different theories shape research questions and methodologies, thereby enhancing the comprehension of social structures and interactions. The method finally reveals the cyclical and interdependent relationship between theory and research.

### **Objectives of the Research**

The paper "Exploring the links between theory and research in sociology" outlines several key objectives aimed at enhancing the understanding of the relationship between sociological theory and research. The primary objectives include:

1. Examine how established sociological theories interact with the structure of research projects.
2. The study seeks to provide a clear explanation of the cyclical and interdependent relationship between theory and research.
3. The paper aims to underscore the significance of theoretical frameworks in guiding the research process.
4. To explore the potential of interdisciplinary methodologies in enhancing sociological theory and practice.
5. Encourages researchers to prioritize theory-driven research, arguing that such an approach is essential for producing robust and meaningful research outcomes.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Theory**

*Theory* represents “a statement of constructs and their relationships to one another that explain how, when, why, and under what conditions phenomena take place” (Cunningham, 2013; Cunningham, Fink, & Doherty, 2016). Several elements of this definition warrant more attention.

In the first place, theory consists of constructs and propositions. Constructs are approximated units that cannot readily be observed, while propositions represent the expected relationships among those constructs (Bacharach, 1989). For instance, in a situation where a sociologist investigates prejudice toward people with disabilities and the degree to which spending time with such individuals helps reduce the negative attitudes toward them. In developing the study, she thinks that context matters, such that interactions spent while participating in sport will be especially useful in lessening prejudice. In this example, prejudice, context, and interactions represent constructs. The relationships among the constructs represent propositions.

The relationship between theory and research is an integral part of scientific inquiry. Theory provides the foundation for research, as it allows us to form hypotheses and develop research designs that can be tested. On the other hand, research provides evidence and data to test and refine theoretical models. On the other hand, research provides evidence and data to test and refine theoretical models. In this blog post, we will explore the connection between theory and research in greater detail, and discuss why both are necessary components of knowledge production.

### **Exploring the links between theory and research**

The relationship between theory and research is a fascinating one. Theory provides us with a framework for understanding the world around us and research helps us to explore and test those theories. Theory helps to inform research, giving us an idea of what to look for and research helps to refine and shape the theories, allowing us to gain a better understanding of the world around us. By exploring the relationship between theory and research, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the world and how it works.

### **Why Theory is Essential in Research**

Sociological theory is of great significance and a central cornerstone to teaching and research in the discipline of Sociology. It is practically difficult if not impossible to teach and understand Sociology without the study and understanding theories embedded in the discipline, thus, research in sociology may equally be deficient without exploring the theories and by taking a theoretical position. While theories generally are explanatory frameworks and intellectual scaffolding to understand realities and phenomena in societies, sociological theories make explanation and understanding of social relations possible. Sociological theories enable generalized explanations and particular understanding of social relations and social processes in manners that allow appreciations and projections of social relations and realities. It is impossible within the discipline to efficiently and effectively explain social occurrences, issues, situations and developments without theoretical localization and contextualization (Akanle & Olutayo, 2021).

Theory is an essential component of research; it is the foundation of the scientific method. Theory provides a framework for understanding the relationships between variables and how they interact with each other. It helps researchers to develop hypotheses, test them, and draw conclusions.

It helps researchers to develop hypotheses, test them, and draw conclusions. Without a theoretical basis, research is nothing more than a collection of facts. Theory provides a way to interpret the data and draw meaningful conclusions. It provides a basis for understanding the relationships between variables and how they interact with each other. Theory is an essential part of research because it provides a way to interpret the data and draw meaningful conclusions.

### **Some Theories used in Sociological Research**

Research is a systematic process of collecting and analyzing data to gain insight and understanding of a particular topic. Theory is a set of principles and ideas that explain how something works. While research provides the data to explore a phenomenon, it is the theory that helps us interpret the data and make sense of it. While research provides the data to explore a phenomenon, it is the theory that helps us interpret the data and make sense of it. The relationship between theory and research is one of symbiosis; they both rely on one another in order to produce meaningful results. Theory informs the research process by providing a lens to interpret data and research helps to inform the theory by

providing evidence to support or refute it. To understand the real-world implications of a particular phenomenon, it is important to understand the relationship between theory and research.

There are various types of theories and research in sociology. Some of the most prominent theories and research include:

- a) **Structural functionalism:** This theory focuses on the importance of social structures and institutions in maintaining social order and equilibrium. Research within this framework often examines how various social institutions such as family, education, and government contribute to the overall functioning of society (Parsons, 1951).
- b) **Conflict Theory:** This theory emphasizes how power differentials and social inequalities contribute to social conflict and change. Research within this framework often investigates how different social groups and classes compete for resources and how these power dynamics shape social structures (Marx, & Engels, 1848).
- c) **Symbolic Interactionism:** This theory focuses on the meanings that individuals assign to symbols and how these meanings shape their interactions and behavior. Research within this framework often explores how individuals construct their social realities through interactions and shared meanings (Blumer, 1969).
- d) **Feminist Theory:** This theory analyzes the ways in which gender inequalities and patriarchy contribute to social structures and interactions. Research within this framework often examines gender roles, power dynamics, and inequalities between men and women (hooks, 1981).
- e) **Social Constructionism:** This theory posits that social phenomena, such as identities, are socially constructed through societal norms and interactions. Research within this framework often examines how society collectively constructs and reinforces various aspects of reality (Berger, & Luckmann, 1966).

### **The Role of Research in Theory Building**

It is generally understood that, theory and research are closely connected. The initial impetus was that research were conducted in search for theory. In this connection therefore, theory development relies on research while research also relies on theory. Thus, the relationship between theory and research could be characterized as dialectical, a transaction in which the theory determines the what and how of data collection, while research findings provides ground for which developed theories could be challenged (Nuamah, et al, 1999).

Research could thus, be seen as a vehicle through which theories are developed, it is the process necessary for the collection data necessary for the development of theory. This is particularly true when a research is been conducted with the aim of creating a theory or refuting an existing one. Research plays a vital role in theory building. It is used to test and refine theories, as well as to provide evidence in support of new theories. In other words, research can uncover the underlying mechanisms that explain why certain phenomena occur. For example, a researcher may observe that a certain behavior is related to a certain environmental factor.

This relationship can be used as a basis for developing a theory about why that behavior occurs. Research also helps to assess the validity of theories, by testing them against empirical data. By doing so, we can identify any discrepancies between theoretical assumptions and actual observations.

By doing so, we can identify any discrepancies between theoretical assumptions and actual observations. Ultimately, research is essential in helping to build strong, evidence-based theories that can be used to make meaningful predictions and informed decisions.

### **Benefits of Combining Theory and Research in Practice**

In order to achieve the best results in any practice, it is essential to combine theory and research. Combining theory and research can help practitioners gain an understanding of the context and background of their practice, as well as provide evidence for the efficacy of their methods. This combination of theory and research can also assist practitioners in making informed decisions and adjustments to their practice based on the evidence that has been gathered. This combination of theory and research can also assist practitioners in making informed decisions and adjustments to their practice based on the evidence that has been gathered. By understanding the relationship between theory and research, practitioners can develop more effective strategies and approaches to their work. Ultimately, the combination of theory and research can help practitioners maximize the impact of their practice and ensure the best possible outcomes for their clients.

### **Results from the Review**

The study does not overtly reveal conventional "results" as commonly seen in empirical research studies; rather, it consolidates observations concerning the correlation between theory and research in the field of sociology. The principal conclusions obtained from the given circumstances are as follows:

- a. **Interdependence of Theory and Research:** The study underscores the strong and mutually reliant relationship between theory and research. Theory serves as a conceptual structure for comprehending research, whereas research provides empirical data that confirms and improves theoretical concepts.
- b. **Role of Research in Theory Building:** The role of research in theory building is widely recognized as an essential element in the formulation of sociological ideas. Its purpose is to examine and improve current theoretical frameworks, confirm or disprove assumptions, and provide novel insights about society. Undertaking this procedure is crucial for developing strong, empirically-supported hypotheses that may guide further research and practical applications.
- c. **Framework for Understanding Social Phenomena:** The study emphasizes that sociological theories act as fundamental frameworks that direct the gathering and analysis of evidence in an effort to comprehend social phenomena. They assist sociologists in formulating hypotheses and deriving meaning from their findings, therefore enriching the comprehension of social multifaceted phenomena.
- d. **Validity Assessment of Theories:** Authenticity: Research is crucial in evaluating the soundness of theories by subjecting them to empirical validation. This procedure facilitates the identification of inconsistencies between theoretical assumptions and empirical findings, which is essential for enhancing theories and guaranteeing their applicability in elucidating social phenomena.
- e. **Mutual Necessity** The main finding of the study is that both theory and research are interdependent and cannot exist independently. Both are necessary for understanding the intricacies of the social realm, and a robust correlation between them is imperative for cultivating significant knowledge and understanding.

### **Contributions of the Paper**

The study titled "Exploring the links between theory and research in sociology" provides valuable insights into the correlation between theory



and research within the sociological discipline. The main contributions derived from the given circumstances are outlined below:

**1. Clarification of the Theory-Research Relationship:** The study provides a clear explanation of the cyclical and interdependent relationship between theory and research. It emphasizes the notion that theory guides the research process by providing a structure for interpreting data, whereas research produces evidence that may either confirm or question established hypotheses.

**2. Framework for Theory Development:** The theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of research as a means of constructing theories. According to the study, research is essential for testing and improving ideas, making a valuable contribution to the advancement of more resilient sociological frameworks. This paradigm promotes the idea that researchers should consider their work as an integral component of a broader theoretical conversation.

**3. Mutual Dependence:** The study emphasizes the interdependence of theory and research, proposing that successful sociological investigation necessitates a harmonious integration of both facets. This observation encourages researchers to integrate theoretical perspectives with actual research in order to improve the credibility and practicality of their discoveries.

**4. Dialectical Relationship:** The study characterizes the link between theory and research as dialectical, whereby theory influences the formulation of research questions and procedures, while research results serve as the foundation for the confirmation and enhancement of theory. This continuous contact process is essential for the advancement of sociological knowledge.

**5. Implications for Future Research:** The study encourages the use of a more integrated strategy in future sociological investigations by elucidating the symbiotic link between theory and research. This contribution is especially beneficial for academics endeavouring to formulate novel theories or enhance current ones grounded on empirical data.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, theory and research are closely linked and mutually dependent. Theory provides the framework for understanding research, and research provides the evidence for validating and refining theory. Neither theory nor research can exist in isolation, and both are essential for understanding the complexities of the world around us.

Neither theory nor research can exist in isolation, and both are essential for understanding the complexities of the world around us. A strong relationship between theory and research is therefore essential for developing meaningful knowledge and insights.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Based on the insights from the paper "exploring the links between theory and research in sociology," several recommendations can be made for future research in sociology. These recommendations aim to enhance the integration of theory and research, ultimately leading to more robust sociological inquiry:

- 1. Emphasize Theory-Driven Research:** Researchers should prioritize developing clear theoretical frameworks before embarking on empirical studies. This approach will help in formulating precise hypotheses and research questions that are grounded in existing sociological theories, thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of the research findings.
- 2. Foster Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Encouraging collaboration between sociologists and researchers from other disciplines can enrich theoretical perspectives and research methodologies. This interdisciplinary approach can lead to innovative insights and a more comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena.
- 3. Utilize Mixed Methods:** Future research should consider employing mixed methods that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches. This strategy allows for a more nuanced understanding of social issues, as qualitative data can provide context and depth to quantitative findings, thereby bridging the gap between theory and empirical evidence.
- 4. Focus on Practical Applications:** Researchers should aim to connect their theoretical insights with practical applications in real-world settings. By doing so, they can demonstrate the relevance of their work to practitioners and policymakers, ultimately contributing to more effective strategies and interventions in social practice.
- 5. Encourage Reflexivity in Research:** Sociologists should adopt a reflexive approach, critically examining how their theoretical perspectives influence their research design and interpretation of data. This self-awareness can lead to more rigorous and transparent research practices, enhancing the credibility of sociological findings.
- 6. Promote Continuous Theory Refinement:** Researchers should view their findings as opportunities to refine existing theories rather than

merely validating them. This perspective encourages ongoing dialogue between theory and research, fostering a dynamic and evolving understanding of sociological concepts.

## REFERENCES

- Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor Books.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods (5th ed.)*. Oxford
- Gelles, R. J., & Levine, A. (2017). *Sociology: Exploring the architecture of everyday life (12th ed.)*. Sage Publications.
- hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a woman: black women and feminism*. South End Press.
- Macionis, J. J., & Plummer, K. (2018). *Sociology: A global introduction (7th ed.)*. Pearson.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The communist manifesto*. Penguin Classics.
- Nuamah, I.F., Cooley, M.E., Fawcett, J., & McCorkle (1999). Testing a theory for health related quality of life in cancer patients: a structural equation approach. *Research in health and nursing*
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. Free Press.