**Interpretivism and Positivism in consumer behavior:**

 **Comparative analysis**

 **Iqra University, Karachi.**

 **Publisher: Madiha Obaid**

 **Date:31 January,2023**

 **Abstract**:

This paper explores the research paradigms, underlying phenomena of interpretivism and positivism in consumer behavior. The aim is to focus the comparative analysis between interpretivism and positivism. The paper is also based on ontological and epistemological position of both philosophy. This paper also includes advantages, disadvantages of interpretivism and positivism regarding consumer behavior.Thus the conclusion of this paper is to combine both of the approaches to remove fundamental flaws.

 **Keywords**:

Interpretivism, Ontology, Epistemology, Positivism, Consumer behavior

**Introduction; Interpretivism As a research Philosophy**:

In early days it realizes that interpretivism approach was the native method of Sociology and it is empirical and quantitative in nature. Earlier it is complex to identify the social, cultural values and beliefs. After many researches it has been observed to convert it into qualitative research in order to elaborate specifically social construction.

Interpretivsim is an approach which have some important aspects of the study. It also integrates the social construction by mainly focus the reality. On the other hand, it has also some critique of Positivism. Researchers also acts as a social researches to identify the human values, beliefs and differences. It is naturalistic approach which includes data collection and also focus on the secondary data research. This Philosophy has three main points.

i) Hermeneutics

ii) Phenomenology

iii) Systolic Interaction

The interpretivism also based on Relativist Ontology which is based on reality to understand individual's perspective and experiential levels. Interpretivism also based on transactional approach in which people wants to seek knowledge and cannot be separated from the knowledge, so to fill this gap there should be a clear link between the researcher and researches subjective.

**Ontological and Epistemological positions in Interpretivism:**

The interpretivist approach based on social construction. As Ontology is the study of being existence, reality and how the world works. It is based on how researchers thinks and how they really work. Whereas, Epistemology is the study of nature and how knowledge is created. Guba and Lincoln in 1994 explains the term Epistemology that how knowledge is formed and also explains that how the multiple realities based on the system for meanings. The Interpretivism in relation to Ontology and Epistemology is very important as it describes the very crucial part of being existence and knowledge is formed. The basic goal of Interpretivist research is to understand human behavior. There are some paradigms which have concerned regarding to Ontological and Epistemological approach.

The Ontological position in Interpretivism is based on relativism. Relativism is the reality and differ from person to person. Reality comes from consciousness and without consciousness world is not meaningful at all. As reality is subjective. There are many concerns related to individual approach.

The Epistemological position in Interpretivism is based on real world. Many people have different meanings in different ways. Knowledge and reality are the main source to construct relation between human and the world. The aim of Interpretivism is to enlighten the hidden social forces and structures. Interpretivist approach helps to understand individual's perspective by interaction between individuals.

  **What is Consumer Behavior?**

The term consumer behavior that operates upon the environment to deal with "Cause and effect". It is a part of Social Science because it is very crucial to control human behavior in the environment. The study operant Psychology is the study of behavior, operant behavior indicates that can be conclude rather than observed and measured. Operant approach sometimes criticized due to neglection of actor's subjective experience. Because here is a need to tackle with individual reaction within the situation. Operant study involves conditions learning through the consequences of behavior. The basic purpose to find out the meanings of consumer behavior because it helps to marketing managers to know about how and why the social sciences inflamed by the causes of consumer's action. Why people choose this brand, why they are moving to this brand. Marketing is all about preferences based on consumer behavior. It consists of consumer's emotion, attraction and preferences of buying. Studying consumer behavior helps in order to engaged client that they purchase from you. We can inflame consumers by marketing campaigns, personal preferences. This is the brief discussion on consumer behavior before come towards main article. In the paper we discuss interpretivism approach in consumer behavior. Because as a research philosophy it is very important to identify consumer's psychology and focus individual's views. The purpose of this paper is to understand consumer's reaction and their expectation.

 **Interpretivism in Consumer Behavior:**

In the field of market research it is compulsory to understand consumer's reaction and their expectation regarding their purchase. Interpretivism is the approach which helps to understand the consuming power rather than the buying. Interpretivism also helps to recognize the human behavior, it removes the illness in respect of destructive consumer behavior. Basically, there are two main approaches in research, Positivism and Interpretivism which provides us better understanding of consumer behavior. The consumer behavior approach consists of various steps. As Interpretivism mainly based on qualitative method. So it consist of depth interviews, focus groups, projective techniques and metaphor analysis. Customer satisfaction is one of the most crucial part of consumer research. As it is very important in a research work that your findings should be "Reliable" and "Valid". Consumer research becomes the major focus for social sciences. It is playing an important role in market research as well. Interpretive research is everywhere in the world as it is inherit in human behavior. Interpretive approach helps to determine in depth consumer market, brand meanings, understand customer market interaction, market place. Through Ethnographic research, it becomes easy to highlight individual's views through interviews, focus groups, observations projective techniques. Empirical material has been developed for qualitative interviews, discussions journals, diaries, documentary material. Interpretivsim is suitable to understand individual's behavior is research work.

**Advantages of Interpretivism**:

If we focus on the positive side to adopt the philosophy of interpretivism, so we realize that it mainly focus the qualitative method. Interpretive approach mainly covers the area like cross cultural differences in organization, ethical issues, leadership etc. These social construction can be studied in depth in interpretive approach. On the basis of primary data high level of validity can be generated because these data are honest. There are many benefits of qualitative research method because qualitative research provides the deep description of participants and opinion. On the other hand interpretive approach is beneficial in consumer research as it is mentioned above that researcher can mainly focus on individual's perspective and group focus. Consumer research depends on "How consumer's views about purchase and why"?. Therefore interpretive approach helps to find out solution of them questions in depth. In market field it is very important to focus customer satisfaction and to deal with this it should be foremost priority to know about customer's need and customer's views in depth. Through interviews, focus groups, communication researcher can easily focus on the main areas of issue.

Bachman in 1998, showed in his study that qualitative study provides the platform of information with performance deeply. Interpretivism helps to understand the human experience. Denzin and Lincoln mentioned that qualitative research provides a wide range of epistemological views. Interpretive approach provides the meaning of actions in terms of language and through language assessment researches can easily focus the issues which needs to be analyze. During the interview or data collection researcher can directly interact with the participants.

**Disadvantages of Interpretive Approach**:

The main disadvantage of this philosophy is that this approach is subjective in nature and for biases it is important to rely on researchers as primary data. So it cannot be generalized as primary data collected by personal point and values. These are obviously some limitations. Silverman (2010) argue, that qualitative method sometimes leave out contractual sensitivities and focus on meaning and experience. Qualitative methods sometimes neglect the social and cultural construction of the variables. Because of small size researcher cannot generalize the results. Lan (2015) admitted that during his research due to the small size he would not be able to claim wider generalization to other contexts. Data interpretation may become more difficult. According to Ramsey, Thiessen, Buchan and Daly (2016), they mentioned that interpretive approach does not focus the research topic because of the primary data collection, language assessment but focused on the thematic analysis. Whereas in secondary data, researcher can use the secondary data to investigate a new question which were not exposed in primary data. It has been observed that data analysis and research question using the same data, which has been previously used. Finally, analysis take a time and can be generalize the result in a larger population but in a limited way.

**Positivism**:

This approach was first describe by Auguste Comte (1798 - 1857). His main focus to capture "social science". Comte was the first philosopher of science. Positivism based on empirical evidence. The study of positivism based on the study of the society which includes empirical scientific evidence. It is a belief of positivist approach that we should not go beyond the limitation of what we can observed. The question which arise from the observation are only approached by the application of scientific method. Positivist believe that there are some social facts which can make the rules of society. Social facts consist of values, nouns of beliefs of an individual. Sociologist applying scientific principles on the society for the better change in society. Because positivist think that society can be studied like the natural world so that they can put forward proposals analyze and wate the social facts.

Positivism and Interpretivism are the two basic approaches in research. After the brief discussion on interpretivism this paper holds another approach which is positivism and the basic purpose of this paper is to adhere the comparative analysis of positivism and interpretivism. Positivism based on that the world exists objective. And the most important point is positivist approach based on quantitative methods such as statistical survey structured questions and experimental research work. The results which are derived from the positivism based on the truth which obtained as a result which later theorized or modeled. In marketing research, positivism based on growth of new product and to construct consumer behavior models. Positivists shaping the individual according to the social facts. Positivist priority is to use the same techniques and methods to study the social world, like "Natural" science does. Positivist work like a scientific techniques to uncover the laws in a similar manner like scientists have discovered the laws. Their main focus to correlate one or more variables, known as comparative method. Positivists studies are purely based on facts. In positivism observation made on the basis of human senses. Inductive process used to develop hypotonic to be tested. Positivist approach based on the valid source of knowledge.

 **Ontological and epistemological positions in Positivism**:

The positivist approach according to ontology is that they believe that world is external (Carson et at, 1988) and only one objective reality to any research phenomena. The researchers construct or controlled research by identifying a clear research by testing hypothesis and by a suitable method. They actually created a bridge between reason and feelings (Carson et at 2001). They also made some clear understandings between science and personal experiments. Statistical and mathematical techniques used to uncover single and objective reality.

The main purpose of positivist research is to make time and context free generalizations, because human behavior only described by real causes.

The epistemological approach says that knowledge can be developed only objectively, without researches. When knowledge is developed it becomes truth. These should be a existence between participant and researcher to develop truth. According to epistemology research is based on making "Knowledge claims". Researchers come as a objective observer to explain the phenomena of objectivism. They describe this phenomena by symbols and languages in a real form. Many scholars criticized positivist approach because objective is appropriate way for studying natural science but it cannot apply in social phenomena. Positivist approached based on experiments. Empirical evidence needed, hypothesis constructed. It is a deductive approach. Positivist approach should good, reliable and valid.

**Advantages of Positivism**:

Positivism based on quantitative research because positivist thinks that it is a most reliable way to conduct data in a scientific way and more trustworthy. Positivists define a structure and discussion in a well define way. Positivist believe that as there are many laws and rules to followed so changes of error is minimum. There are many drastic changes in variable hence when it comes to study it is more accurate. In positivism its a believe that objective inferences and conclusions are made on the basis of as long as the person doing the observation and ignore the emotions. Because human behavior comes from emotions. Hence positivist disregards the emotions because there is no validity that it will remain same during the studies.

**Disadvantages of Positivism**:

Some researchers believe that positivists approach is conducted on the basis of measurements and calculations so they tend to be inflexible. As positivism approach is objective so it can be observed or reproduces, and is made up of some tough facts that comes from consensus built over time. Objective knowledge is factual. Writing and documents are made during an event are the source of objective knowledge. Newspaper, textbooks and videos are the sources of objective knowledge. Thus, usually then facts are not influenced by personal beliefs or emotions. Positivists approach comes from your own observations. The scientific knowledge based on experiments 10, objective knowledge also done on the basis of experiments. The line between objective and subject becomes more blurred when consideration of one is based on philosophical position through anyone can easily knows our own experience. Positivists approach has inability to prove its hypothesis more accurately. Finally the great disadvantage of positivist approach based on two principal. One is to search its ideal and perfect standards of scientific methods because analysis on the basis of such researches are too unrealistic and the second is positivist approach lack of sympathy and it considerations of the subjective, individual and hermeneutic aspects of the social phenomena. Positivisms does not works outside world like in cities, companies villages and organizations.

 **Positivism in Consumer Behavior**:

The positivistic approach regarding consumer behavior is the traditional approach to consumer research. According to Martin Callingham the main area of weakness of this research is quantitative approach. Because it is difficult to analyzed the input factors against the actual outcome. It is clearly stated that quantitative research is science based with objectively reliable. Consumer behavior does not comes in the scientific approach. There are some positive values in this approach. Positivism is limited because any variable which is not a part of the research is totally disregarded. It is very important to capture all the valid points of consumer behavior but it will not be captured which may be an essential part of the research. However, positivism deals with the cause and effect of behavior which can be identified and isolate. Event can be objectively measured. Positivism helps to observed social life and come up with precise conclusions. Positivism can be used to affect the social change and improves human condition.

**Interpretivism Vs Positivism; Comparative analysis**:

There are two approaches in the field of research interpretivism and positivism. The main focus of this paper is to study consumer behavior according to these approaches. However it is crucial to first understand basically what is interpretivism and positivism as this paper has discussed initially. The main area of this paper is this part because it has focus that which approach most suitable to consumer behavior. As it a detailed debate between science and art. Positivist approach is quantitative is nature where are interpretive approach is quantitative. The major advantage of positivist approach that it is conducted in a statistical manner, a large group of individuals can be studied through statistical set that explains consumer behavior. The main focus of this approach based on four Ps which will make up the decision making process for consumer. During this research hypothesis is set up to prove or disprove. The positivist approach based on statistics so the questioning of consumers will target to figure out the solutions in the form of graph. The reliability of the findings is tested by statistical methods. The significance level of data can checked. Whereas this approach fundamentally misses the main facts of human behavior because different consumer will make different decision. At this point somehow positivist approach cannot fix this facts properly. However interpretive approach aims to target these factors in to accounts. Interpretive research is qualitative and subjective in nature so easily focus the smaller groups and individuals as a consumer behavior base on a more subjective factors related to cultural and sociological effects. With this approach the subjective beliefs of the researcher can be easily figure out. Subjective thought vary depends upon the consumer behavior. But it is a fact that without statistical approach it can be very difficult to determine consumer's behavior accurately.

**Conclusion:**

The study of these research paradigms regarding consumer behavior is that there are some flaws and strengths of both approaches. Sociologist works on understanding the human behavior, their interactions, views and then provides a framework for a society. The benefit of interpretive approach is that this research is subjective so researcher can easily understand behavior of an individual but on the other-hand because of the small sample size and without constructing the hypothesis it is difficult to makes the result more accurate and reliable. Whereas positivist approach is objective, larger sample size and variables helps to make the result accurate and trustworthy. The summary of these difference can be conclude by combining the both approaches together, fundamental flaws can be removed by the combination of these two approaches.

 **Reference list**

Scotland J. (2012), Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research. Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive and critical research paradigms, English language teaching, 5(9) 9 - 16.

Hiller, J. (2016), Epistemological foundation of objectivist and interpretivist research.

Edirisingha, P. Interpretivism and positivism (Ontological and Epistemological perspertives).

Alharahsheh, H. H. & Pius, A. (2020), A review of key paradigms: Positivism Vs Interpretivism. Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences 2(3), 39 - 43.

Nickerson, C. (2022), Interpretivism paradigm & research philosophy. Simply Sociology, 5.

Pulla, V. & Carter, E. (2018), Employing interpretivism in social work research. International Journal of social work  and Human services practice, 6(1), 9 - 14.

Rehman, M. S.(2020), The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language "Testing and assessment" research. A literature review.

Nickerson, C. (2022), Positivism in Sociology: Definition, Theory & Examples.

Essays, U.K. (2013), Advantages and Disadvantages of Positivism.

Nickerson, C. (2022), Interpretivism paradigm & research philosophy. Simply Sociology, 5.

Fischer, E. (1990), Regularities, rule and consumer behavior tangencies between positivist and interpretive approaches to research. ACR North American Advances.

Ahmed, A. (2008), Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Assumptions. Qualitative and Quantitative online submission.