

The Interpretivist Research Paradigm: A Subjective Notion of a Social Context

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to give a high-level overview of interpretive research paradigms. It delves into the philosophical foundations of interpretivism research paradigm among all other research paradigms. This article begins with a summary of the components of the interpretivist research paradigm, with an emphasis on ontological and epistemological viewpoints from interpretivist researchers. Next, it addresses the challenges interpretivist researchers face while conducting research under the Interpretivist paradigm and what characterizes the components in this paradigm are next discussed in detail. As researchers can explore subjective phenomena under this paradigm, this article takes a philosophical methodological stand to discuss how interpretivist researchers can distinguish themselves while conducting research by not adhering to several paradigms as they are mutually exclusive. The choice of a philosophical perspective to evaluate a subjective phenomenon should be guided by the demands and requirements of the research study, rather than focusing on the needs and requirements of a research investigation.

Keywords: Interpretivist, Qualitative Research, Subjectivity, Paradigm

Introduction

Researchers use different paradigms depending on the purposes of research and the positions they carry in their research. Based on the research paradigm, the research questions and objectives are explored, therefore understating the paradigm in conducting research is crucial. Many higher degree research students and even early career researchers find it difficult to express and implement the concept of research paradigm in their research. According to Lather (1986), a research paradigm intrinsically reflects the researcher's views about the environment in which he or she lives and wishes to remain. It is made up of the overarching principles and conceptions that shape how a researcher perceives the arena and how he or she interprets and behaves within it. When we state that a paradigm establishes a researcher's worldview, we mean that it contains the summary values and notions that shape how a researcher views the arena and how he or she interprets and acts within it. For any empirical research, the enquiry and research use an interpretive method based on Ryan's (2018: 9) concept which assumes that "truth and knowledge are subjective" because of differences in our culture and life experiences. Learning from the interpretive approach

suggested by Berryman (2019: 273) who believes that “social construction, language, shared consciousness, and other social interactions” are important means for interpretive to invent facts. To achieve this goal, Berryman (2019:273) believes that for interpretive researchers, to find answers to qualitative questions, they need to structure their research questions in a way that focuses on understanding “how and why.” Interpretations’ is related to the philosophical position of idealism, and is used to combine different methods, including social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics; the method of rejecting objectivist views, meaning that meaning exists independently in the world (Collins, 2010; Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006) According to the interpretive approach, it is important for researchers as social participants to understand the differences that exist between people (Saunders et al., 2012). Interpretations’- also known as interpretive, involve researchers explaining the elements of research, so the research who do interpretive research incorporate their subjective notions and beliefs into research because they believe that through the exploration of human language, the meanings can be understood and shared in a qualitative research (Myers, 2008; Carey, 2012). Therefore, it is important to understand who are interpreting, why they are interpreting and how they are interpreting.

The terms “interpretive research” and “qualitative research” are frequently interchanged, despite the fact that the two concepts are fundamentally different. As a research paradigm, interpretive research is based on the premise that social reality is shaped by way of human experience and social backdrop, thereby making it well suited to do research on human behaviors which are related in the context of its socio-cultural issues (Rehman and Alaharti, 2016; Shah et al., 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Interpretive researchers see social truth as embedded of their social surroundings and it's far not possible to summary from it due to the fact they “explain” truth through a method of “understanding” in place of a hypothesis trying out method with the aid of using and integrating the participants’ subjective experiences, notions and beliefs of their respective social and cultural context (Rehman and Alaharti, 2016; Shah et al., 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Therefore, in this paper it is attempted to offer a discussion how interpretivists can take a position to specialize in people's subjective experiences, to build the social international through sharing meanings, and the way they have interaction with or relate to every other. As an Interpretivist researcher, by reviewing literature, I argue that to interpret, researchers should have a meta-eye [looking beyond what they can perceive] by crossing past empirical data to view their subjective notions, opinions, emotions, values and the matters that cannot be at once discovered and counted. A substantive literature review on Interpretivists is discussed in section two to have a discussion how and why researchers have been using this paradigm. Next section is about the methodological approach this paper has taken to discuss the subsection notions of the researchers. The third segment outlines into four subsection on the role of researchers, subjectivity and interpretivists and how the interpretivists analysis is done. Finally, the last section reviews the ideas and concludes the thoughts.

Literature Review

As the interpretivist paradigm is founded on the assumption that people's perceptions, ideas, thinking, and the meanings that are significant to them can be understood through researching their cultures (Boas, 1995), therefore the methods used to comprehend human and social sciences cannot be compared to those used in physical sciences, because humans translate their surroundings and behave based on that interpretation (Hammersley, 2013:26). Interpretivists also adopt a relativist ontology in which an event may have several

interpretations rather than a fact that can be determined via a particular method to gain a deeper understanding of the event and discover the complex issues and the phenomenon in the specific context the situation is embedded in (Creswell, 2007) so that researchers are able to see what has happened and how it has happened.

On the grounds of Ontological and epistemological viewpoints, the meaning of reality is socially constructed through the experiences of social narrators, which might reduce to resonate the occurrences that are situated socially (Whitley, 1984). Referring this notion, as an interpretivist researcher, one should understand that there could be more than one interpretation of the findings derived from the data so it is the responsibility of the researchers to find ways to see and understand the diverse nature of experiencing the issues and the situation in various cultural settings (Hammersley, 2013).

One of the benefits of this paradigm is interpretivist scholars can use their diverse viewpoints on phenomena to not just describe objects, people, or events, but also to deeply comprehend them in their socio-cultural contexts because they believe that they have shared belief systems in the society they are living in. Furthermore, the studies in interpretivist paradigm can take the approach of different methodologies- from narrative study, case study to ethnography because they provide the in-depth life experiences of the narrators (Tuli, 2010) who are the social actors who constitute their culture. Moreover, researchers can probe an interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, perspectives, emotions, and perspectives by utilizing the key approach of interactive interview, which allows researchers to analyze and set off matters that we cannot observe. Researchers can probe an interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, perspectives, emotions, and perspectives (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). As a result, gathered valuable data will provide academics with better insights for future action.

Despite the above significant advantages, an interpretive worldview is not without its criticism. Many theorists and scholars criticized Interpretivism paradigm for its subjective notions, beliefs and perspectives of participants, for instance, Yanow (2006) discusses that the perspective of self is strong for interpretivists that sometimes they overlook how peoples' perceptions are powerful and how they are influenced by this power when they interpret their subjective ideas. In light of their anticipatory prejudgment and preconceptions, Interpretivist researchers comprehend and analyze the social reality which might be another criticism interpretivists face (Gadamer, 1970). Not constantly retaining a concrete speculation previous to area work, the dimensions of a few small 'n' studies, and the dearth of generalizability and objectivity also are problems raised in opposition to interpretivist studies (Yanow, 2014). These reviews and concerns, however, are a count number of philosophical differences. Interpretivists over the years have advanced straightforward and first-class studies practices that counter those arguments (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014).

Instead of generalizing the findings from the results gathered from the participants and their social contexts, interpretivists try to gain from a greater understanding and knowledge of phenomena within the context's complexity (Cohen et al., 2011; Blaikie, 2004) which might pose a question on the validity and reliability of the data findings-meaning that as interpretivism is subjective rather than objective (Mack, 2010; Lawrence, 2015), the outcomes of the data may reason to many bias because of the researcher's personal interpretation but researchers need to remember that interpretive research may not always be able to address their preferable choice of research questions or anticipate future behaviors that might take place during the data collection process (Willis, 2013). One of the major issues of interpretivism is the lack of attention paid to the political and ideological impact on

information and social reality though Interpretivist researchers were continuously striving for a correct comprehension of the things they were interpreting (Bernstein, 1983). Instead of focusing on the problems linked with people's and societies' empowerment, this paradigm aims to gain knowledge about modern occurrences and this position and attitude, according to Mack (2010), implicitly ignores the problems of agency that of our society.

Methodology

From a philosophical point of view, this paper takes stand as a conceptual paper following the notion of creating “bridge existing theories in interesting ways, link work across disciplines, provide multi-level insights, and broaden the scope of our thinking” (Gilson and Goldberg 2015:128). This paper analyses and supports the theories of Interpretivism and synthesizes the notions of literature from an analytical angle to suggest on problematizing the exiting literature address. Moreover, as Fulmer (2012:330) sates that, “in a theoretical paper the author is faced with a mixed blessing: greater freedom and page length within which to develop theory but also more editorial rope with which to hang him/herself”. Therefore, arguments aren't derived here from statistics within side the conventional feel, however, it contains the assimilation and mixture of proof within the shape of formerly advanced standards and theories to create new information through carefully constructing on current discussions to develop the argument.

The Role of Researchers in Interpretivist Research

The role of researchers has been discussed and criticized in Interpretivist research. In some methods such as ethnography, action research, and participation observation, the researcher is supposed to be a part of the social phenomenon, and the specific role and participation in the research process must be explained in detail when analyzing the data.

As interpretive analysis is encompassing and circumstantial, but not reductionist and isolationist, this allows the researchers to provide interpretive explanations which tend to focus on language, signs, and meaning from the perspective of participants participating in social phenomenon (Black, 2006; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Moreover, examining and accumulating all the data can be carried out simultaneously and repeatedly in this research (Black, 2006). A researcher might, for example, conduct an interview and code it before moving on to the next one; simultaneously, analysis aids researchers in identifying and correcting possible weaknesses in the interview process, as well as adjusting it to better capture the phenomenon of interest but if the researcher sees that her original study topic is unlikely to yield new or useful insights, s/he may modify it, which works as a valuable benefit of interpretivist research that is sometimes overlooked (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

As the term "interpretivism" refers to approaches that emphasize the significance of people's personalities and participation in social and cultural life (Elster, 2007), this knowledge is philosophically related to a researcher's worldview (Yanow, 2006) by choosing a paradigmatic camp that entails a slew of underlying assumptions about reality (Hathaway, 1995). This research allows the researchers to take position that people's knowledge of reality is socially constructed (Elieason, 2002) so the researchers should accept that the reality as true with there's one goal actual world, and they view the arena as social constructed because interpretivism studies typically focus on meaning and may use a variety of methodologies to reflect various facets of the research topic (Pulla and Cartar, 2018). Epistemologically, questions about the ‘knowability’ of the concern or phenomena of study, even as

interpretivists accept as true with that facts cannot be accrued or eliminated from context and as such the knowledge is rebuilt and regenerated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2010; Yanow, 2014). This research suggests collecting data based on theories, categories and strategies, selecting research sites, interviewees or cases based on theoretical considerations, such as whether they are suitable for the concept being studied (for example, what do women educator experience in the their professional field and how these experiences affect them to achieve their goals). They have some specific qualities and specialty that make them very much suitable for research (for example, research on the experiences of women educators at Tertiary institutions definitely requires some challenges and barriers to be able to create opportunities for their professional development), and so on. Therefore, different purposeful and random samples of participants for the data collection process are given importance in interpretive research but the importance will definitely not be if they do not meet the demand of the nature and objectives of the research.

How this Paradigm can Apply in Research

This paradigm applies to this research because this research can identify in depth life experiences. Through the analysis of the data, researchers can explore, explain, express and attempt to place themselves in the participant's vision or thinking pattern in order to reconstruct the text's intended meaning. For example, if the topic is the challenges women face for their professional development, the interpreter might want to explore a) how and to what extent, each respondent becomes a Professional person; b) how they learn to fight all sociocultural, economic and other obstacles; c) society the extent to which economic and cultural forces have ruined their personal and professional development badly. The interpretive stance will assist a researchers to deliver deeply into the social fact via the testimonies of my individuals and "their lived situations" (Weaver & Olson, 2006: 406). Through this method, the information, in an effort to be accumulated via narrative interviews, as extra or much less subjective; the individuals have accrued experiences, beliefs, and views inside positive contexts and are encouraged through sure price structures of their tradition and society. As such, researchers examine the facts as debts of fact which are built uniquely with the aid of exploring people however additionally fashioned through competing values in society.

Our private experiences of doing research positioning from interpretivist notions and lifetime tutoring gives a sure benefit within side the shape of knowledge, revel in, and recognition approximately the difficulty as a lady in Asian Countries, in addition to an expert in a tertiary institution. Ryan (2018: 9) explains that researchers are in no way capable of distance themselves from their inbuilt "values and morals" and that inevitably affects their information collection, its interpretation, and analysis. And yet, we pay attention to and comply with up at the participants' responses at some point of the interview, examine the statistics with important and self-reflexive lenses, and interpret the information with the aid of using placing the information and the rhetorical structures in the narratives in opposition to the bigger context of society and culture.

Interpretivists and Subjectivity

The notions of subjectivity and Interpretivist complementary each other because a researcher who uses an interpretivist approach must be interested in the subjective meanings of the participants because this gives an understating to other people and the world they live in; nevertheless, researchers have curiosity to discover and explore how people make sense of

their surroundings, how they understand other people's activities, and how they perceive interpersonal-social relationships in the context they are surrounded in (Sheppard, 2012; Rubin & Babbie, 2013). Although Trauth (2001: 7) claims that through interpretive lens, most are influenced by qualitative methods and there are a few caveats to such viewpoints. Moreover, the word 'qualitative' isn't always synonymous with 'interpretive' as Myers & Avison (2002:5) state. Qualitative research may or may not be interpretative, based on the researcher's underlying philosophical views and within the interpretive paradigm, knowing the subjective meanings of people in investigated and interpreted. However, the central principle of interpretivism is to work with the subjective meanings that already exist within the social world; that is, to identify their presence, reconstruct them, recognize them, avoid distorting them, and use them as building blocks in theorizing (Goldkuhl, 2012).

Subjectivism is associated with interpretive or qualitative research methods as this is based on people's subjective experiences. It must be entirely based on the meanings and expertise of the actors being analyzed therefore, the conceptions concerned with common-sense enjoyment of the intersubjectivity international in everyday life are the social constructs on which the social reality can be created (Schutz 1970, p 274). The major goal is to gain a better understanding of how people construct, modify, and interpret the social reality in which they live.

The Considerations for Interpretative Analysis

It is a challenging task for researchers to analyze data interpretively because the researchers go through the self-reflection process, therefore, it is crucial to that research approach the analysis process with caution and thought. The researchers need to check carefully all the aspects of the analysis, while documenting the data systematically.

One of the consideration for the interpretive analysis is the observation method according to Bhattacharjee (2012) and he suggests that this approach must be interpreted from the participants' points of views as there are directly connected to the particular social context they are in. Moreover, researcher need to focus on the two levels of interpretation as the first involves observing or experiencing phenomena from the subjective perspective of social participants, and the second involves understanding the meaning of the participant's experience in order to provide a "detailed description" or a rich narrative of the phenomenon of interest, which can explain why the participants acted as they did (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Bhattacharjee (2012) also discussed about how recording the verbal and non-verbal language of participants and analysis of them is an integral part of interpretive analysis. The researchers must ensure that the story is viewed through a person's eyes rather than a machine, and must experience that person's emotions and journeys so that readers can understand and connect with that person because in interpretivism, the use of images, metaphors, satire, and other rhetorical devices is very common (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Moreover, as interpretive research is usually not concerned with finding specific answers, but with the understanding or "understanding" of dynamic social processes that unfold over time, therefore, this type of research needs long-term immersive participation of researchers at the research site in order to identify the whole journey of the phenomenon of interest (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Nevertheless, interpretation and explanation is an iterative process that moves back and forth from observation fragments (text) to the entire social phenomenon (context) to reconcile their apparent inconsistencies and builds a theory relevant to different subjective viewpoints firmly fixed with participant's experience and his iteration between the

understanding/meaning of the phenomenon and observation should continue until it reaches theoretical saturation, thereby any additional iterations will not yield more insights into the phenomenon of interest (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Conclusion

Therefore, it could be suggested that for novice researchers, interpretative research might be ideal for uncovering the hidden causes of something that is interrelated with subjective issues or it could be extremely complicated social processes like socio-cultural issues, conflicts and challenges, where qualitative data can be skewed, inaccurate, or impossible to understand. The thoughts suggest that researchers could use interpretivist paradigm as they are frequently useful and beneficial for theory development in situations where there is no a priori theory or when a priori theory is insufficient. For example, there are theories of feminism for the issues in a patriarchal society but they all are based in Western centric context but they can be used to investigate a context-specific, one-of-a-kind, or extremely rare event or process, for example, there could be theory development on based on Asian context, more specifically South Asian context. By doing so, interpretivists researchers can aid in the discovery of relevant and interesting research questions for future studies.

However, we need to remember interpretive research is not devoid of its own set of obstacles and challenges. For instance, this form of research frequently necessitates more time and money. Despite this, as the above findings suggest, interpretive research necessitates well-trained researchers capable of viewing and explaining complex social phenomena from the perspective of embedded participants, as well as managing the various opinions and thoughts of these participants without taking into account their personal biases or made-up choices and incorporate them into their conclusions. Moreover, not all participants or data sources might not be equally reputable, fair, or understandable regarding the phenomenon of interest, or they may have an unspoken political agenda, which can lead to misinformation or erroneous perceptions according to the discussed literature. Thus, it is important that researchers should spend time with their participants to build mutual trust so that participants would likely to provide complete and honest data for the purposes of research. The last but not the least, interpretive researchers should not be judgmental and influenced by biased contextual notions and that way their research would be trustworthy.

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