

# Facts and values in social science



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

**‘ It is not possible to separate facts from values in social science research’.  
Discuss this statement by using empiricist and interpretative approaches**

**Introduction**

The most complicated study in the realm of knowledge is the behaviour of human beings. It is always relative and unpredictable, the thought pattern always moulds with respect to time, space and circumstances. The social structure and embedded traditional fabric guides the human behaviour accordingly (Harris, 2001). So if we are into research we ought to consider the value system as a major variable. The social science research methods are thus incomplete if we ignore the role of values. It is not possible to separate facts from values in social sciences because of the huge impact factor of the social structure over a phenomenon, for instance doing research in Indian society and ignoring the caste structure; would not bear considerable results. To work in Saudi Arabia it is mandatory to study the Arab traditional way of life and the blend with Islamic fundamentals. The empiricist school follows purely scientific tools of research; which is not influenced by social orders or value systems (Barton, 1999). On the contrary the interpretative school take in to account the value structures; this school is also known as hermeneutic approach (Barton, 1999). The laws of pure science aren't concerned with the traditional ways of life; they are same in all parts of the world. But on the other hand social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, international relations, psychology involves the study of human behaviour that is not value free (Harris, 2001). In these soft sciences the importance and impacts of social life can't be ignored out rightly. This is not because the research work is not rigorous or lacks in objectivity or validity but the subject matter is human

attitude and behaviour which includes norms and values. Both these norms and values have different forms and manifestations in every particular society. Historically the study was known as humanities because of the mode of inquiry and approach to the methods of discourse towards the realm of knowledge (Harris, 2001).

### **Explanation**

With the development of the subjects of social sciences the need emerged that empiricism must be applied for more effective and problem solving generalizations. The growth patterns in research lead to the development of different variances while following these traditions, the nature of empiricist tradition has been mathematical and value less which is only based on empirical data that is regardless of the fact that there is deviation in human behaviour and circumstances. This deviation may cause disorders in the data which is only reflected through positivist traditions. Therefore, while dealing with human behaviours through this approach it is a far possibility to arrive at a value free theory. Critical theorists have come up the assumptions that there is always a circumstantial reason behind every school of thought, power structure govern the body of knowledge according to its interest needs that cater the policies of powerful in the world where chaos is the only political order (Harris, 2001). The realist school of thought is the greatest justification of status quo for the powerful nations of the world; the liberal school is thought to be coined for the interests of capitalists and their free trade paradigm. The idea of clash of civilization by Samuel P Huntington caters the foreign policy of US in the later decades of 90's, so as the theory

of the End of History by Francis Fukuyama which says that liberal world order is the only solution for the global governance (Ritzger, Smart, 2001).

Thus coming to the definitions of the phenomenon of facts and values, online dictionary implies that the fact can be defined as something that actually exists; reality; truth or something known to exist or to have happened. A fact can be known as the truth known by actual experience or observation; something known to be true. On the other hand values can be defined sociologically as the ideals, customs, institutions of a society toward which the people of the group have an affective regard. These values may be positive, as cleanliness, freedom, or education, or negative, as cruelty, crime, or blasphemy. From the above definitions it can be deduced that value is an ideal and fact is the happening or the practical manifestation of the value. Values are intertwined with facts and give meaning with the help of facts (Harris, 2001). Without values facts are meaningless and vice-versa. Answers regarding the simple facts regarding a river or pollution level in the air can be given through scientific research but when it comes to sociological facts values becomes the guiding principles or the driving force for the facts.

In social sciences behaviouralism brought a fundamental transformation in the thinking process which took turn after the age of reason and enlightenment in between 1600 (Ritzger, Smart, 2001, p371). It started with the study of the natural world and spread to the study of social sciences or soft sciences. People now believe that most of the natural and social phenomenon is under the jurisdiction of science. Social scientists gather data through specialized techniques. These techniques include participant observation, key informants, focus group discussion and sampling. The

empirical data includes the evidence which people have felt through their sensory perception. This thing creates confusion among researchers as they cannot employ their senses directly to observe things like intelligence, opinions, attitudes, feelings, emotions, power and authority (Ritzger, Smart, 2001, p371). This thing also creates confusion in the research world and gives birth to debate that it is not possible to separate facts from the values. For instance, the difference between the cure, prevention and ones attitude towards disease is called cancer. In other example the approach would be different while a researcher would measure the attitude towards economic systems applied in different societies.

The German sociologist Weber is the creator for freedom from value decision in the social sciences, an ideal he referred as Werturteilsfreiheit (value-freedom). He says that there is a rational distance; it's not a matter of quantity, separating the causal premise and empirical generalizations of science from value judgments. It is more of moral, political, and aesthetic first choice. Social scientists keep the two sides, fact and value. Thus it can be argued from the Weber, that this separation is not observed by anyone.

Weber seized that values affect the way in which research is done in the social sciences and that the values are also affected by the research results. Facts can be brought to bear on values, affecting one's holding of them. On the research side of the human disciplines, evaluations enter into the subject matter. Using understanding explanation that is, the subject's evaluations seen in relation to the conditions of his or her action, the researcher can hope to sort out the decisive motives of the actor studied. In research, the

scrutiny of values permits a discussion between investigators that can clarify the points of view each brings to bear.

Values serve the science by an empirical treatment. Values ultimately come into view, in practical situations the implications of values are judged in particular terms. In addition new values can be revealed and their factual consequences can be judged (Weber, 1949). Value is not determined by any fact for instance and is necessarily free (Weber, 1949). It is free because it is a value (Weber, 1949). And it is because there are a lot of values and they are at odds, and according to Weber these are warring gods in the modern world.

Humans are cultural beings and are caught in the chains of the culture, values, norms and traditions. Both the researcher and the respondent cannot get rid of the cultural implications. Taking the culture as the object social scientists must recognize the prerequisite for a cultural science is as cultural beings, humans take up behaviour to the world and give it meaning and significance. Values permit this. Core cultural values in cultural science change with culture over time (Weber, 1949).

Weber's idea of value-freedom is of extreme importance that research cannot be conducted in space. Hence the cultural values are enveloped in the cultural facts. Values and facts are interrelated and interdependent. No value in culture is out of context of facts (Weber, 1949). Infact cultural facts give meaning to values and norms. Thus it cannot be separated from the cultural context. Thus this idea gives that Weber is positivist and facts be

studied for scientific purposes and only science cannot save the human beings only.

The empirical researcher asks for the objectivity in the research keeping in view the apolitical environment (May, 1993). However the interpretative research looks for the reflection of personal point of view. It infact does not ask for the value freeness, rather it sees the values and meanings fused together (May, 1993).

The empiricist approach tends to say that all the social research is based on the empirical data and evidence. All the knowledge is empirical in nature and intensity. Social research is based on rationale and empirical observations. Social research involves the contact between thoughts and evidence. Ideas help social researchers to give sense to the evidence and the researcher use this evidence to support ideas.

Research has attempts to influence the real world. No laws in social science are parallel to the laws in the natural science; whereas law is a universal generalization about a fact and fact is an observed phenomenon and it means it has been seen, heard or otherwise experienced by researcher (Barton, 1999, p232). Thus the researcher holds a relationship with the society directly. Empirical school is all about data collected through sensory perception and all that. This term was used for certain ancient Greek practitioners of medicine who rejected following to the basic principles, preferring to rely on personal experience and observation. Building further, empiricism became a theory which refers that knowledge arises from experience and evidence gathered using senses (Barton, 1999, p232).

Scientifically, the term refers to the gathering of data using only evidence that is observable by the senses or in some cases using calibrated scientific instruments. The investigator tries to describe the interaction between the human senses and the unit being observed. The researcher is expected to adjust tools by applying it to known standard objects and documenting the results before applying it to unknown objects. Thus in short it can be analyzed in empirical school that the facts and values are part and parcel of any culture and society (Couvalis, 1997, p40). Facts give meanings with the help of values and values through facts. Both are pre requisites of each other. When the word scientific comes in vogue than it means that only scientific and systematic methods of inquiry are applied to understand and investigate the social phenomenon that includes interaction among more than two individuals. The values and norms are the guiding principles of this interaction. Values are a set of ethics or standards of behaviour and are held in high esteem and sought-after by a particular society in which a person lives (Couvalis, 1997, p45). Without values, life is confusion, signifying nothing. It is the pre-requisite to be human.

Everything in this world is relative, truth is not truth but it is being made truth, constructed as a truth, thus perceived to be truth, so it is the perception which makes our impression which we except as a truth and the only truth in this time frame is that only the creature is absolute. So facts are actually truths about social world driven under the umbrella of values. Relatively speaking neither Earnest Najel is wrong nor Longino or Karl Marx. But every phenomenon has some critique, which is valid to considerable



extent. For this reason not totally disagreeing with any one I would just highlight some angles upon which light could be thrown.

It is not against the use of scientific method to apply to social research, no doubt science has developed a lot it has revolutionized our lives and mechanized as well, here the stress is at, mechanized our lives, when it comes to human thoughts the development means a lot but as man is social animal so his social world tends to be developed the world around him and the world in which he lives. For this reason objectivity of using scientific methods in social fields is sought.

But prior to check whether there is any similarities between natural science and social phenomenon, for using them simultaneously they must be identical in subject matter, in terms of application and generalisation. Are the patterns to the theories similar in these respects? Social science is based on rules while natural science is based on laws. Social theory need to be reduced to natural theory.

Replicating a social phenomenon for the sake of experimental study might be possible in some cases but not in all cases, thus behavioural, cultural, and the normative order could make difference. Anatol Francis said that the difference between animal and human being is like literature and lying. Scientific approach has been very rigid as far as the conclusion are concerned either right or wrong while on the other side it not the same case.

Social scientific thesis is not compatible and universal, that is not applicable every where and could not be tested or verified universally as values very society to society and same as the facts. Science approach cannot give you

perceptions. It can tell a person what s/he can do, not what s/he should do. Put another way, treating the ideas as a coherent system of thought, science can point out to an actor what is possible within his or her value system, and what would be contradictory to that value system.

Social constructivists urge that understanding the production of scientific knowledge required looking at all the factors causally relevant to the acceptance of a scientific idea, not just at those the researcher thinks should be relevant. Science is thought to be the knowledge of elites. Authoritative explanation of knowledge makes difference, while tradition also plays its part in your knowledge system.

Problems of social policy are not based on purely technical considerations of specific ends, but involve disputes about the normative standards of value which lie in the domain of general cultural values. This conflict over general cultural values does not occur solely between ‘class interests’ but between general views on life and the universe as well. The non-scientific world information is accepted on trust, so in science, knowledge grows by depending on the testimony of others. What are the implications of accepting this fact for our conceptions of the reliability of scientific knowledge? Until recently, apart from a few anomalous figures like Caroline Herschel, Barbara McClintock, and Marie Curie, the sciences were a male preserve.

Feminists turned to Marxist models of social relations and developed versions of standpoint theory, which holds that the beliefs held by a group reflect the social interests of that group. As a consequence, the scientific

theories accepted in a context marked by divisions of power such as gender will reflect the interests of those in power. Alternative theoretical perspectives can be expected from those systematically excluded from power. (Rose 1983; Haraway 1978). Objective science must distinguish between value judgments and empirical knowledge, and try to see factual truths. However, value-judgments of the practical interest of the scientist will always be significant in determining the focus of attention of analytical activity.

Interpretative social sciences go back to the German sociologist Max Weber and another German philosopher Wilhem Dilthey. This is related to the word hermeneutics that originated in the nineteenth century. This employs that making the obscure plain. This thing refers that true meanings are rarely simple or obvious on the surface. One absorbs that scanning through the complete text. In this method the researcher uses participant observation and field research method. The interpretative researcher lives for year among the respondents to collect data. This is the organized analysis of the social actions through direct and detailed observation of the people in the natural world. The goal of the social research is to deep down understand the social life and discover how people construct meanings in the natural setting. The basic aim of the interpretative social science research is to discover social reality.

### **Conclusion**

All the social sciences studies and researches are conducted to find out the meaning and truths behind the values. All the facts give explanations to the prevailing values in short. The purpose of the research is to give scientific

explanation to the facts and to dig out the universal laws about human behaviour (Weber, 1949). It is not the motive to separate values from the facts. As I have previously mentioned that both are interlocked. In our society the correlation of values with daily life holds a cliché. The above debate can be concluded that values and facts are interlinked and phenomenon and concepts which give meaning while combined (Barton, 1999, p232). All research is empirical in nature and holds roots in the society that is composed of human beings. Research is an ongoing, evolving, moving process. The current knowledge and paradigms are not perfect. The only aim is construct scientific laws about human behaviour and when the word behaviour is used, the term values automatically jumps in. facts in any cultural, societal and communal reflection explains the values and norms of that particular society. Social scientists gather and explain data accordingly. Thus it can be concluded that generally established objectivity and subjectivity or simply reality versus values that is applicable to individual cultures only. In their own conclusion, the authors state that it will be the theory of argumentation that will help develop what pure logic could not, the “ justification of the possibility of a human community in the sphere of action when this justification cannot be based on a reality of objective truth.” (Bizzel and Herzberg, 2001, p. 1377)

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