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# Epistemological currents in management sciences

TURKI MAKNI Amal<sup>1</sup> and ELLOUZE TRIKI Molka<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>a PhD student in Marketing, IHEC Carthage, Interdisciplinary University-Business Management Laboratory (ISCAE Manouba), Tunisia

<sup>2</sup>b PhD student in Marketing, ISG Tunis, Marketing Research Laboratory (FSEG Sfax), Tunisia

**Abstract:** Epistemological positioning is essential to any researcher because it influences the research methodology and the collection and processing of data. Moreover, it allows the researcher to control the evolution of his research work, the relevance and coherence of the approach to establish its validity and legitimacy. Hence, the choice of epistemological positioning is an exercise that requires a great deal of attention and seriousness on the part of any researcher, considering the field of research and the objectives set. Several epistemological currents are studied in management sciences, particularly in marketing. This research work aims to shed light on three of the most mentioned currents, namely (1) positivism, (2) interpretative, and (3) constructivism.

## 1 What is meant by epistemological positioning?

*“Epistemological reflection is essential for any researcher concerned with carrying out serious research because it allows the validity and legitimacy of the research to be established. Indeed, all research work uses a method, and offers results aimed at predicting, prescribing, understanding, constructing, or explaining. The explanation of the presuppositions of the researcher makes it possible to control his approach, increase the validity of the knowledge that is derived, and confer on it an accumulative character. Epistemological reflection is therefore consubstantial with any research”* (Girod-Séville and Perret, 1999, p.13).

Thus, epistemological positioning is vital to any researcher because it influences research methodology and the collection and processing of data (Demaizière and Narcy -Combes, 2007).

In addition, it makes it possible to control the evolution of his research work, the relevance as well

as the coherence of his approach to establish its validity and legitimacy (Perret and Seville, 2007; Gavard -Perret et al., 2012). The epistemological system allows the researcher to explain “*what research logic and what referent it fits into*” (Roussel and Wacheux, 2005, p.5). Hence the choice of epistemological positioning is an exercise that requires a lot of attention and seriousness on the part of any researcher, taking into consideration the field of research and the objectives set (Perret and Seville, 2007).

Epistemology is defined as “*the critical study of the principles, hypotheses, and results of the various sciences, intended to determine their logical (non-psychological) origin, their value and their objective scope*” (Lalande, 1991, p. 293). It brings together the methods specific to each scientific research, the procedure to follow in scientific thought, as well as the problems of scientific truth (Lalande, 1992). Thus, it is interesting how knowledge and “*valid knowledge*” are constructed for each individual (Piaget, 1967; Lalande, 1992; Demaizière and Narcy-Combes, 2007).

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<sup>a</sup> amalmakni1712@gmail.com

<sup>b</sup> molkatriki00@gmail.com

Despite the confusion that exists between the notions of “epistemology” and “methodologies” in the literature (Igalens et al., 2005), Avenier (2012) distinguishes differences between the two. Indeed, while epistemology focuses on the value of good knowledge, methodology deals with the process of creating validated learning. Thus, the researcher should not limit his epistemological reflection to the validity of his approach but also question the value of the knowledge that is being developed.

## 2 Conceptualization of epistemological positions in management science

A paradigm is “a disciplinary matrix made up of concepts, postulates, laws, and methodologies to which the practitioners of a particular discipline refer” (Kuhn, 1970). It is considered as “a basis for theoretical work and a starting point for research” that “facilitates the understanding of complex systems, limits the field of investigation and directs research towards a vision of reality” (Shapere, 1964).

Several epistemological paradigms currents are studied in management sciences, particularly in marketing. However, the focus will be on the three most mentioned currents, namely; (1) positivism, (2) interpretivism, and (3) constructivism (Perret and Seville, 2007).

### 2.1 Positivist paradigm

Positivism as epistemology is based on man’s vision subject to a deterministic vision of the social world, in other words, to “invariable laws” (Thiétart, 1999, Thietart and Coll, 2003, 2007). Reality can be described and predicted based on linear cause and effect relationships and universal laws. Thus, unlike interpretivists and constructivists, positivists wish to make fact explicit. Nevertheless, existence and the observed or experienced subject are independent.

Therefore, the positivist paradigm advocates reality as existing separately from the representations of individuals. Moreover, the object he observes is independent of the observed subject. The knowledge constructed is thus objective and dependent on the context in which the actors interact (Perret and Seville, 2007).

### 2.2 Interpretativist paradigm

Interpretivism is epistemology based on the idea that the researcher can only understand social reality by considering the meaning given by the actors. The objective of this current is not to link the causes to the consequences but to grasp the interpretative mental patterns of individuals and to better understand the meaning of the facts by the actors involved.

Therefore, the discourse is at the heart of the interpretative activity and appears as a condition of existence and determination of the representations carried by the social exchange. Interpretativists then seek to understand the meaning attributed by individuals to the reality that comes from the interpretations made in a given context by individuals and from their interactions at a given time.

Besides, interpretative epistemology focuses on the beliefs, intentions, and motivations that guide individual behaviour.

Thus, knowledge is created through the interaction between the subjectivity of the actors and that of the researcher.

### 2.3 Constructivist paradigm

Constructivism as epistemology is based on the idea that knowledge and representations are the product of human abstraction. It refutes the idea of the search for universal laws and emphasizes the need to understand how the phenomenon is organized, perceived, and constructed by the actors. Constructivists seek to not only understand the meaning given to the reality of individuals but also want to participate in its production. They don’t assume that an objective reality exists. This reality is deduced from speeches and interviews and constitutes a reproduction of reality. The meaning-making model, advocated by Weick (1995), allows us to understand the adaptations of individuals to corporate events. Indeed, the world exists through cognitive constructs to deal with the equivocality and incoherence of action contexts (Weick, 1995). Actors thus use their frames of reference to construct reality.

## 3 The positivism, interpretativism and constructivism paradigm: What are the differences?

Positivism is a classic current of research that focuses on verifying a pre-established reality by looking for causal links between facts. , In contrast, interpretivism and constructivism guide the researcher toward the construction of a non-existent reality or knowledge that is understood as a representation of the cognitive experience of individuals.

Thus, the objective of these two epistemologies is to lead to the description of an event, 1996, p.265).

Table 1 below summarizes the differences that exist between the three epistemological currents.

**Table 1.** Comparison of epistemological currents.

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Positivism	interpretivism	Constructivism
Independence of subject and object or, reality (Objective reality)	Dependence on subject and object or, reality (Subjective Reality)	
Knowledge generated by discovery and explanation	Knowledge generated by interpretation and comprehension	Knowledge generated by interpretation, by understanding, and by construction
Verifiable and confirmable knowledge	Idiographic knowledge (of the individual)	Knowledge inadequacy according to the appreciation of the researcher
"Deductive" knowledge creation reasoning	"Inductive" knowledge creation reasoning	

#### 4 CONCLUSION

If quantitative methods fit with the positivist "paradigm", qualitative research would be on the side of constructivist or interpretivist paradigms (Maurand -Valet, 2011). In addition, "to explore, the researcher adopts an inductive and, or abductive type approach, while to test, he uses a deductive type approach" (Petit and Durieux, 2007, p.60).

Thus, qualitative research is based on induction and abduction. Deduction consists of verifying the hypotheses created from the theory. It is based on the researcher's intuition who deduces assertions from his knowledge which he tries to prove (from the general to the specific) and makes it possible to reproduce reality objectively (Thiétart, 2003). While induction is based on observing of particular cases to justify a general theory by passing from the particular to the general. Thus, it makes it possible to create a new approach (Charreire Petit and Durieux, 2003).

Moreover, quantitative methods are based on deductive reasoning (Blais and Martineau, 2006).

# Responding to peer reviewer comments

Dear [QQR] reviewers,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit a revised draft of my manuscript titled [Epistemological currents in management sciences] to [QQR]. We appreciate the time and effort that you and the reviewers have dedicated to providing your valuable feedback on my manuscript. We are grateful to the reviewers for their insightful comments on my paper. We have been able to incorporate changes to reflect most of the suggestions provided by the reviewers. We have highlighted the changes within the manuscript.

- **Comments from Reviewer 1 (about Grammarly and Language comments)**
  - **Comment 1: [Correctness.]**  
**Response:** [All necessary corrections have been made]
  - **Comment 2: [Clarity.]**  
**Response 2:** [All requested clarifications have been made. All requested clarifications have been made. However, it is to inform you that the passive voice has been adopted as a form in the drafting]
  - **Comment 3: [Engagement.]**  
**Response 3:** [All the remarks mentioned with regard to the choice of words have been taken into consideration and have been modified according to the meaning of the paragraph]
- **Comments from Reviewer 2 (Plagiarism)**
- **Comments from Reviewer 3 (Responses by section)**
  - **[How to respond to comments that you agree with]**
  - **Section 7**
    - **Comment 1:** [Conclusion: this section is missing]  
**Response:** [You are right, it was a typo. The word conclusion has been added to the text]
  - **[How to respond to comments that you disagree with]**
  - **Section 3**
    - **Comment 1:** [The article is descriptive, it does not present any problematic or methodology of treatment, but only a comparison between the different currents used in the management.]

**Response:** [La comparison between the different currents used in management since the paper deals with the comparison of paradigms specifically in management science].

- **Section 4**

- **Comment 2:** [The results section is missing]

**Response:** [the paper does not contain a result part since it is a theoretical paper].

- **Section 5**

- **Comment 3:** [The author has presented a comparison between the different currents used in management but this comparison is not presented in one section (the discussion section)]

**Response:** [The comparison between the different currents used in management has been presented (in the table as well) but not in the discussion section because it is a descriptive paper].

- **INTRODUCTION**

- **Comment 1:** [The introduction is clear, only it does not include the outline of the article.]

**Response:** [The plan of the paper was mentioned as follows: This research work aims to shed light on three of the most mentioned currents, namely (1) positivism, (2) interpretative, and (3) constructivism. ]