

**3 Primary Paradigms of Social Science Research**

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Dimensions	Positivist	Constructivist	Critical
Ontology	those things we accept as existing are those things that have been firmly established as existing by verifiable evidence	what exists is what people perceive to exist	what really exists cannot be ascertained simply through empirical research, except with the assistance of social theory
thus reality is..	<i>stable</i> : reality is made up of facts that persist long enough to be generalizeable	<i>dynamic</i> : reality changes with changes in people's perceptions; reality is socially constructed	<i>contested</i> : struggle for power to define reality  <i>hidden</i> : underlying structures and practices that maintain status quo may be obscured by the taken-for-granted
Epistemology	knowledge is gained through experience, but experience must be firmly established as verifiable evidence on which all will agree	knowledge is obtained by participating subjectively in a world of meanings (not verifiable facts) created by individuals; emphasizes the subjectivity and social construction of all knowledge	the world of appearances (what we experience) does not necessarily reveal the world of mechanisms (what causes the world of experiences or appearances)
Viewpoint	<i>outsider</i> : reality is what quantifiable data indicate	<i>insider</i> : reality is what people perceive it to be	<i>insider or outsider</i> : reality is both objective and subjective
Purpose	<i>prediction &amp; control</i> : seeks causes and effects of human behaviour	<i>understanding</i> : seeks to understand people's interpretations/perceptions	<i>emancipation</i> : seeks to bring about social change
Values	<i>value-free</i> : values can be controlled with appropriate methodologic procedures (neutrality)	<i>value bound</i> : values will have an impact and should be understood and taken into account (disclosure)	<i>value-driven</i> : values determine the nature and extent of social change (commitment)
Focus	<i>particularistic</i> : selected predefined variables are studied	<i>holistic</i> : a total or complete picture is sought	<i>penetrative</i> : attempt to reveal hidden interests, assumptions, structures
Orientation	<i>verification</i> : predetermined hypotheses are tested	<i>discovery</i> : theories and hypotheses are evolved from the data collected	<i>explanation</i> : attempt to link theories with empirical lived experience
Theory	takes the form of scientific law: formal & predictive  e.g. functionalism, behaviorism problem-specific conceptual models (TRA, SLT, ...)	theory as capturing an understanding of people in their environments; reconstruct and account for the reality experienced by people; emphatic understanding of other people's lives e.g. social constructionism symbolic interactionism phenomenology grounded theory	theory attempts to explain underlying structures that influence phenomena: either/both objective facts and subjective meanings; can be either predictive or interpretive, but prediction is not validated by probabilities but by internal consistency/coherence e.g. critical realism political economy feminist theory(s) postmodernism critical theory(ies) (Frankfurt Schl) some psychoanalytic theory marxism
Methodology	verifying actual statements about phenomena; scientific or hypothetico-deductive method	investigation of subjective 'lifeworlds'; do not emphasize replicability or absolute 'truth'	constructing explanations to account for what is observed, but which may not be empirically testable
Data	<i>objective</i> : data are independent of people's perceptions	<i>subjective</i> : data are perceptions of the people in the environment	<i>objective &amp; subjective</i> : 'real' structures can only be known through contestable perceptions of situated actors
Typical methods	survey research mathematical modelling (correlational analysis)	depth interviews focus groups observational research	may use mix of quantitative and qualitative, or just one cultural analysis discourse analysis postmodern deconstruction critical feminist research institutional ethnography case studies
Instrumentation	<i>non-human</i> : preconstructed tests, records, questionnaires, & rating scales are employed	<i>human</i> : the human person is the primary data collection instrument	<i>both human and non-human</i>
Conditions	<i>controlled</i> : investigations are conducted under controlled conditions, and/or controlled for during analysis	<i>naturalistic</i> : investigations are conducted under natural (real world) conditions	<i>usually naturalistic</i>
Results	<i>reliable</i> : the focus is on design and procedures to ensure accuracy & replicability	<i>valid</i> : the focus is on design and procedures to gain 'authentic', 'rich' accounts	<i>useful</i> : the focus is on compelling and insightful explanations that become catalysts for social change

\* WARNING: fitting the philosophy of science onto a single page necessarily glosses over many important details and decades of heated debate within the social sciences; it's offered as a heuristic device to draw attention to certain issues, not as a universal 'factual' statement of mutually exclusive categories of research