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Introduction to Special Section: A discourse on alternative world views in marketing research

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Discussions around different philosophical research approaches have generated interesting debates throughout history. For example, pre-Socratic thought emphasised two approaches, one of a “changeable and emergent world” and another as the “permanent and unchangeable nature of reality” (Chia, 1999, p. 214), which are still ongoing today. Such ongoing discussions are important for contributing to how academics and managers question and approach the problems they face (Lowe et al., 2008). These debates allow us to consider questions such as “How do I understand my external world?” and “How does my understanding of the world influence my conception of myself?”

When answering these questions, we need to respect different worldviews, accept that problems can be approached through multiple perspectives which may be incommensurable to some, but to others it may be possible to integrate and follow multiple alternative worldviews within their research (Schultz and Hatch, 1996). Within marketing, while the dominant paradigm stresses “rationality, objectivity and measurement” (Lowe et al., 2004, p.1058) others perspectives do, of course, exist (e.g. Lowe et al., 2008).

Different worldviews have been highlighted by the numerous “turns” which discuss the advantages of how different research approaches other than the current dominant approach (often positivistic within research in marketing) can offer benefits. Examples of different turns include:

- Linguistic turn; highlighting the importance of language and how it constitutes reality (e.g. Lowe et al., 2008);
- Practice turn; given significance to activity at both individual and societal levels and how actors interpret practice (e.g. Whittington, 2006);
- Complexity turn; given significance to studying complex adaptive systems, combining both systems and process thinking (Urry, 2005); and

- Information turn; with our increasing reliance on interaction with different forms of information and technology, including considering our interaction with artificial forms, questioning our role and technologies role within society (Floridi, 2009).

Considering new approaches when considering how to answer our research problems, and incorporating diversity of thought, allows our research endeavours to develop, and can assist develop and broaden our worldview.

This special section builds on this discourse, highlighting the ways we can approach problems concerning market segmentation from different worldviews. Market segmentation is an important topic within marketing, that can often be vital to an organisation's profitability or growth (McDonald and Dunbar, 1998). Therefore, understanding different worldviews of this important process is critical for both marketing academics and practitioners. While trying not to privilege one perspective and respecting different approaches, we have constructed a discussion around this important topic. This section begins with a paper by Shaw and Nowicki (2018a), which questions whether a market segmentation approach is incommensurable with a Dirichlet approach to marketing management. The subsequent discussion papers include Kennedy and Hartnett (2018) highlighting the importance of evidence-based theory and its approaches, and Lowe and Rod (2018) suggesting that these paradigm ‘wars’ are embedded to some extent in our values and ‘human nature,’ and that temporarily bridging between these approaches, rather than paradigm crossing, would be a step forward. Finally, Shaw and Nowicki (2018b) respond to draw on the analogy of zebra crossings, to bring the discussion together and close this thought-provoking discourse.

We hope you enjoy reading this discussion as much as we enjoyed putting this together.

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