

On the Rhetoric and Relevance of IS Research Paradigms: A Conceptual Framework and Some Propositions

Deepak Khazanchi
Information Systems & Quantitative Analysis
College of Information Science and Technology
The Peter Kiewit Institute
University of Nebraska at Omaha
E-mail: khazanchi@unomaha.edu

Bjørn Erik Munkvold
Department of Information Systems
Agder University College
Servicebox 422
4604 Kristiansand, Norway
E-mail: Bjorn.E.Munkvold@hia.no

Abstract

This paper discusses the relevance of IS research with respect to the rhetoric associated with three IS research paradigms in use - positivism, constructivism/interpretivism and critical research. The discussion is framed in terms of the following dimensions: ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, relationship between theory and practice, and the role of the researcher in the research process. Based on this discussion, the authors propose a theoretical framework to study the relationship of the espoused assumptions of a researcher's perspective with the degree of relevance of their knowledge claims to various stakeholders. In conclusion, some key propositions are elucidated and justified.

1. Introduction

As with every other scientific discipline, the conduct of Information Systems (IS) research is guided by a research perspective or paradigm, comprising ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that together frame the nature of the research and the role of the researcher in the scientific inquiry. However, these perspectives or assumptions may often be held implicitly, in that the governing structures under which the research is produced are not explicitly discussed or reflected upon by the researcher [34].

Over the last two decades, the IS field has been characterized by two parallel and partly intertwined debates: *the paradigm debate* and the debate related to the *relevance of IS research*. Mirroring the discussion in the philosophy of social science, the paradigm debate in the IS field has dealt with the discourse on the supremacy of one research perspective over others, especially with regards to the 'quality of research or knowledge claims'

produced under each research paradigm [5, 12, 24, 30, 41]. The relevance debate has been framed around the questions of what characterizes relevant research, and who should be the audience for this research [3, 14]. Both within academia itself and from industry, critical voices have questioned the relevance of IS research today [7, 9, 31]. IS research has been accused of being reactive and impractical, resulting in limited relevance of research outcomes and near ignorance by practitioners in the field [3, 7, 9, 13, 26, 38].

These two debates are further complicated by the discussion on rigor vs. relevance, where relevance claims under the different paradigms have often been contrasted with the concern for academic rigor of the research produced. For example, two strands in this debate have been that research conducted under the positivist paradigm has been stronger on rigor, while interpretivist research potentially has been more relevant to practice due to its 'contextual grounding'. In general, the relationship between academic rigor and practical relevance has traditionally been presented as negatively correlated, involving a trade-off situation—suggesting that application of IS knowledge claims to practice can only be achieved at the expense of rigor.

However, the nature of these debates so far has mainly been at a theoretical level. Certainly, implications for empirical conduct and practical relevance have been central issues in the debate, but this has still been discussed without giving adequate attention to the connection between the meta-level philosophical rhetoric and the relevance of research results. We believe that there is a need for extending the debate one step further in the 'research value chain', i.e. to evaluate the impact of the products of research inquiries conducted under the different paradigms.

Burrell and Morgan [4] discuss the phenomenon of '*ontological oscillation*', which occurs when researchers in their operationalization of research ideas within an

empirical context (unintentionally or intentionally) deviate from the basic ontological assumptions underlying their espoused research paradigm. Thus, in the words of Argyris and Schön [1], we need to go beyond the ontological and epistemological assumptions espoused by the researchers to also look at their ontology and epistemology "in use". The question that begs answering is whether ultimately, when it comes down to applicability of our knowledge-claims, *do the values ascribed to the rhetoric of a research paradigm actually matter?* In other words, is the rhetoric associated with a research paradigm actually followed in communicating knowledge-claims or do researchers mold their findings to obtain more practical relevance than their research paradigms would in fact allow? Alternatively, does the way research is conducted and reported in the IS field actually fulfill the potential relevance inherent in a paradigm's rhetoric?

Obtaining an answer to the above questions is important for the successful development of the IS field and provides us the opportunity to introspect on some fundamental meta-theoretical issues of importance to the long-term success of our field. This is aptly echoed in Lee's [26, p. 32] comment, "[I]t is not enough for senior IS researchers to call for relevance in IS research. We must also call for an empirically grounded and rigorous understanding of relevance in the first place." In this vein, this paper aims to contribute to the current discussion by increasing our understanding of the concept of relevance, and how this is linked to the assumptions of different IS research paradigms and the perspectives of the target audience for the research.

We clearly admit that this is an ambitious task and this paper only represents the first step in this endeavor. To provide the initial basis for addressing these questions, this paper develops a conceptual framework for assessing the relationship between the assumptions and rhetoric of key IS paradigms and the degree of relevance as perceived by different stakeholders. Rather than generating testable assertions, we use the framework to assert simple propositions that are intended to stimulate debate and reflection on the potential impact of research paradigms on claimed and perceived relevance of knowledge claims for different stakeholder groups. Finally, we suggest some avenues for further research for "validating" the conceptual framework and related propositions. But first, a quick summary of the paradigm debate and the related relevance concerns is provided in the next section.

2. Background

It was Kuhn [25] who first argued that at a particular time in the history of scientific development in a field, "a particular paradigm acted as a framework that determined

the key concepts and methods, the problems that were significant, and so on" (quoted in [35], p. 21). Ever since Kuhn's introduction of the term 'paradigm' in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [25], there has been considerable discussion and controversy about this notion. Most philosophers and scientists today agree that researchers could potentially operate under different paradigms but may disagree on the degree of trust or credibility placed in the knowledge claims of various paradigms (e.g., [35]).

Although Kuhn's "incommensurability of paradigms" thesis has been found to be invalid by many philosophers including Kuhn himself, the basic notion of a paradigm - without the various pejorative connotations attached to the term - is still useful in understanding how scientific research within a field is conducted and how knowledge claims gain credibility. The basic idea being that "a scientist will normally work within a theoretical framework - a paradigm - that determines the problems that are regarded as crucial, the ways these problems are to be conceptualized, the appropriate methods of inquiry, the relevant standards of judgment, etc." [35, p. 205]. There is some consensus beginning with Kuhn [25] and subsequent philosophy of science authors (see e.g., [4, 20, 35] that the term *paradigm* has the following key characteristics:

- Ontology, i.e., the theory or study of existence (being). For example, ontological assumptions in the conduct of inquiry within a paradigm might specifically characterize the nature of reality;
- Epistemology, i.e., a theory of knowledge that deals with the nature of knowledge, its scope, and provides a set of criteria for evaluating knowledge claims and establishing whether such claims are warranted; and
- Methodology, i.e., a procedure by which knowledge is to be generated.

The paradigm debate in IS research has been focused on the dichotomies related to the dimensions illustrated in Figure 1. The dimensions shown in Figure 1 constitute a hierarchy, where higher-level assumptions define the possible scope of the assumptions at lower levels. These levels correspond to those presented by Burrell and Morgan [4] in their scheme for analyzing assumptions about the nature of social science.

Figure 1 also lists the major dichotomies in 'soft' vs. 'hard' IS research, as identified by Fitzgerald and Howcroft [12]. In addition, Fitzgerald and Howcroft (op.cit.) include a fourth level in their analysis, termed the *axiological* level. This level includes the dichotomy between rigor and relevance, normally associated with the hard and soft approaches, respectively. However, several authors have argued that these should not be seen as conflicting goals, and that relevance does not imply that

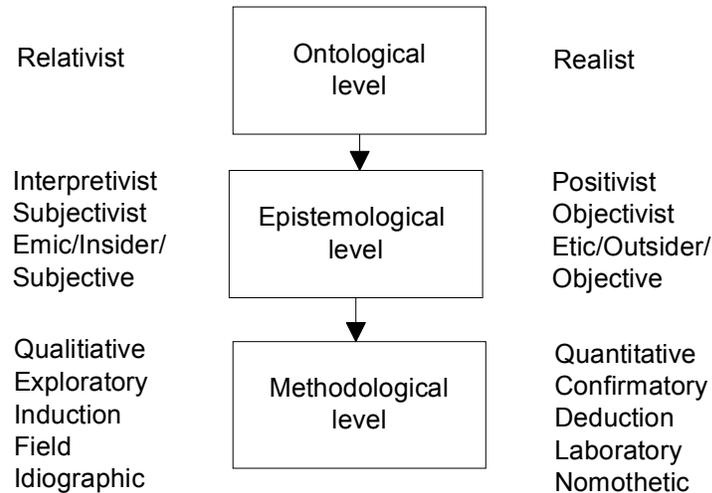


Figure 1. Dimensional hierarchy and major related dichotomies in IS research

research needs to be carried out in a less rigorous fashion (see e.g., [3, 22]).

Traditionally, scientific criteria developed from the natural sciences have been applied for judging the quality of research, but a growing number of researchers argue for developing new criteria that better reflect the philosophical underpinnings of alternative paradigms [17, 24]. Adding to this mix are three key problems faced by IS researchers: (1) There continues to be a lack of consensus regarding the fundamental units of research or phenomena being investigated in IS. This is probably because the IS discipline draws upon several referent disciplines, such as management science, organization science, psychology, sociology and anthropology, each representing different strategies for research inquiries; (2) There is some disagreement on whether calls for methodological pluralism for research inquiry in the IS field [21, 27, 37] is in correspondence with the fundamental assumptions and rhetoric associated with research paradigms. This discussion partially stems from the age old discussion of Reichenbach's distinction between the *context of discovery* and the *context of justification* [36]; and (3) There is some lack of consensus on the very elements that form a paradigm; some authors even argue that the IS field is actually in a pre-paradigmatic stage (e.g., [8]).

3. Conceptual framework

In this section we present a conceptual framework for assessing the rhetoric and relevance of IS research, illustrated in Figure 2. In this figure, the ovals display potential indicants of the constructs shown in rectangles. The bi-directional and uni-directional arrows depicted in

the diagram show potential relationships between pairs of constructs in the framework. For example, it is evident that researchers' philosophical assumptions have to precede any assessment of degree of relevance. Thus, according to this framework, the 'espoused' *philosophical framework* held by the researcher will frame the *type and context of the research* conducted. This together will directly or indirectly - through the intervening constructs, impact the perceived *degree of relevance* for different audience/stakeholder groups and the *sustainability of the knowledge claims produced* from the research inquiry.

Although not included as a dependent construct in this framework, the "perceived" degree of relevance can be conceived as a good predictor of the "actual relevance of research", a more objective, inter-subjective evaluation of a researcher's knowledge claims and its impact on various stakeholders. Each key element of the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 2 is explained in the following sections.

3.1. IS research paradigms

We have used the classification of IS research paradigms into positivist, interpretive and critical research [6, 24, 34] as a starting point for our discussion in this paper. Briefly stated, a *positivist* position ontologically assumes "naive" or "minimal realism" and a belief that only observable things are real and worthy of study. Epistemologically speaking, consistent positivists assert that any knowledge claim or scientific explanation must be arrived at by means of sensory experience. This "verifiability principle" of the early logical positivists was later replaced by the "testability principle" by logical empiricists. For a detailed discussion on the historical

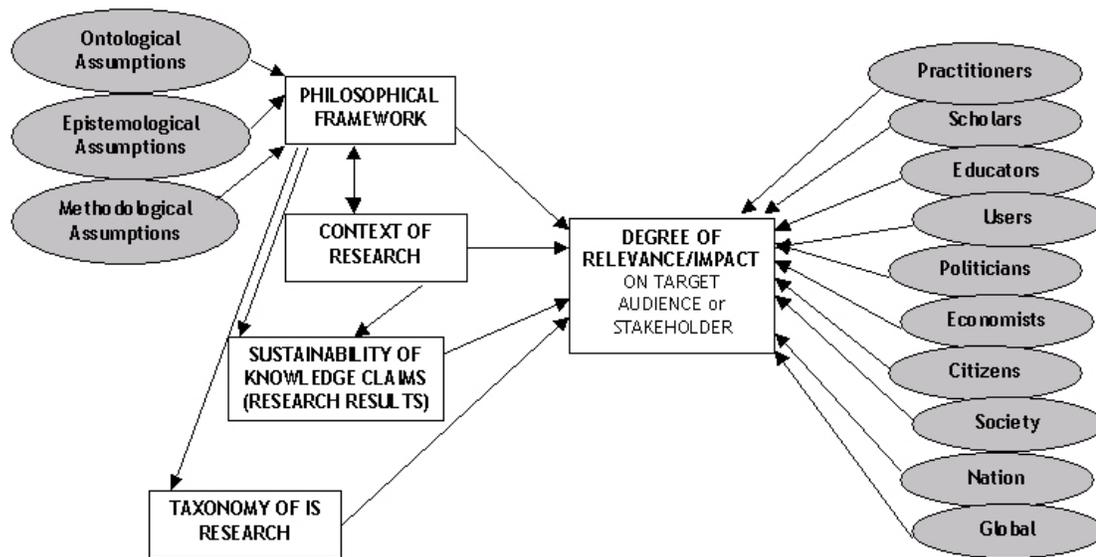


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework for Assessing the Rhetoric & Relevance of IS Research

development of positivism please refer to Hunt [20] and Philips [35]. It should also be noted here that quite contrary to a common misconception, a preference for quantitative versus qualitative methods to verify or test theories is not a dogma subscribed by most positivists. The reader is referred to Philips [35] for a detailed argument regarding this point.

In contrast to positivism, *critical theorists* use a historical realist ontological perspective in which the world is not a universe of facts that exists independently of the observer. In this sense, critical research adopts *relativism* as its ontological basis. The epistemological rhetoric of the critical research paradigm suggests that objective observation is impossible and that all knowledge is generated or justified in the context of the researcher's framework and assumptions. In this regard there are clear similarities between the critical theory and *interpretivist/constructivist* research paradigms - they both include the epistemological notion that objective observation is not possible; however interpretivism includes the additional facet that human experience is a process of interpretation of meanings and actions, that social reality is relative to the observer, and that everyday concepts need to be understood and interpreted to create specific knowledge about the social world. Another basic difference between critical and interpretivist research is the transformative nature of the first, implying a focus on changing the status quo (e.g. related to emancipation and

empowerment), whereas interpretivist research can be regarded as more 'neutral' and descriptive in this sense.

Table 1 provides a comparison of the key rhetoric related to the three paradigms vis-à-vis the levels outlined in Figure 1. The table also illustrates the differences in the rhetoric associated with the *relationship between theory and practice* and the *role of the researcher* in the three philosophical approaches.

A discussion of the relationship between the rhetoric associated with the research paradigms and its impact on the relevance of knowledge claims is postponed till a later section when some key propositions are presented. Suffice it to say that it is well accepted by IS researchers in particular and social science researchers in general, that one's philosophical framework and its implied or espoused rhetoric may have a relationship with the degree of validity, applicability and generalizability of knowledge claims and the latter can clearly differ depending upon the targeted stakeholder consuming the products of research. For example, Benbasat and Zmud [3], who are self-proclaimed positivists in their own right, suggest that the notion of relevance changes according to the paradigm under which the assessment is conducted, thus resulting in different criteria being applied according to different research paradigms.

Table 1. A comparative overview of the key rhetoric of major IS research paradigms [16, 18, 34, 40]

	Positivist ¹	Interpretivist	Critical Research
Ontological Assumptions	"Naive Realism" in which an understandable reality is assumed to exist, driven by immutable natural laws. True nature of reality can only be obtained by testing theories about actual objects, processes or structures in the real world.	Relativist; the social world is produced and reinforced by humans through their action and interaction	Historical realist; social reality is historically constituted; human beings, organizations, and societies are not confined to existing in a particular state
Epistemological Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verification of hypothesis through rigorous empirical testing • Search for universal laws or principles • Tight coupling among explanation, prediction and control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the social world from the participants' perspective, through interpretation of their meanings and actions • Researchers' prior assumptions, beliefs, values, and interests always intervene to shape their investigations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is grounded in social and historical practices • Knowledge is generated and justified by a critical evaluation of social systems in the context of researchers' theoretical framework adopted to conduct research
Relationship between Theory and Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is possible to discover universal laws that govern the external world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generative mechanisms identified for phenomena in the social sciences should be viewed as 'tendencies', which are valuable in explanations of past data but not wholly predictive for future situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generalizations point to regularities of process rather than cross-sectional differences • Generalization in critical research focuses on the "totality" of relationships • There can be no theory-independent collection and interpretation of evidence to conclusively prove or disprove a theory
Role of the Researcher	Objective, impartial observer, passive, value-neutral	Interactive; the researcher interacts with the human subjects of the enquiry, changing the perceptions of both parties	Transformative; initiating change in social relations and practices, helping to eliminate the bases of alienation and domination

3.2. Type (or taxonomy) of research

It is argued that IS research can be classified in terms of its "objectives and methods" (e.g., [33], p. 90). Nunamaker et al. (op. cit) classify IS research into *basic and applied research, scientific and engineering research, evaluative and developmental research, research and development, and formulative and verificational research*. In addition, the authors argue that there are multi-

methodological research approaches such as "systems development" that fit into more than one research category (op. cit). Although they propose this classification without the broader paradigmatic context, one could extend the applicability of their classification as follows: if one accepts the assertion that (a) researchers operate under a given paradigm (implicit or espoused) and (b) paradigms have methodological and epistemological assumptions, then one would have to accept that

¹ The basic characteristics of logical positivism and logical empiricism are included here. Although, clearly there are some fine distinctions between these two research philosophies.

researchers from different paradigms may be able to conduct most of these types of research and their influence on the potential relevance of knowledge claims would be only limited by the constraints of the epistemology in use.

3.3. Context of research

The *context of research* or *situatedness* relates to the question of whether the nature of the implications of a research endeavor is perceived by the researcher to be *general* or *contextually embedded* in nature [23]. For example, cultural differences may result in relevance being assessed differently in different industries, or, on a global scale, in different regions of the world (e.g. North American vs. European practices). One's philosophical framework may also potentially dictate the "context of research" and in turn this may have an impact on the degree of relevance. The espoused rhetoric associated with various research paradigms could have a constraining effect not only on our choice of research methodologies and techniques, but also on the ability to extend one's research outcomes beyond the context in which research is conducted.

In Figure 2, we also show that the context of research can potentially influence the researcher's espoused philosophical framework. This can potentially occur in the choice of techniques within the methodological level of a researcher's paradigm. It can also occur when a researcher attempts to modify or adjust their paradigmatic stance for capricious or opportunistic reasons. This tendency is captured in the notion of ontological oscillation [4], briefly introduced in Section 1. In fact, Burrell and Morgan (op. cit.) provide examples of research that analytically flags a highly subjective stance that denies the existence of social structures and concrete social reality of any form, but that in the empirical operationalization stage "admits a more realist form of ontology through the back door" (ibid, p. 266).

3.4 Degree of relevance to stakeholders

In an earlier paper, we have proposed that the notion of relevance needs to be expanded to incorporate a broader definition of *audience/stakeholders of the research* in terms of the *scope/value of relevant research* [23]. Clearly, the potential scope, value and character of relevance vary considerably with the nature of the targeted audience/stakeholder group(s). Based on this argument, we recommended expanding the notion of relevance to include the scope/value of research attached to IS research by various stakeholders such as practitioners, scholars, educators, users, politicians, economists, citizens, society, national, and global (op.cit).

Therefore in Figure 2, we integrate these concepts into a single construct, "Degree of Relevance" to stakeholder of research and define it in terms of the total *perceived impact of knowledge claims on the various stakeholders* listed on the right hand side of the Figure. Since perceived relevance is clearly subjective in nature, it is inextricably linked to the value system of the actual stakeholders. Thus, the perceived impact or degree of relevance will vary between different stakeholder groups. Rather than viewing relevance as a dichotomous concept (relevant vs. irrelevant), relevance is regarded in our conceptual framework as a matter of degree. This allows for the possibility that knowledge claims from IS research inquiries can be "partially relevant" to some stakeholders (based on [15]). Benbasat and Zmud's [3] notion of relevance in terms of "content" (i.e., interesting, applicable, current) and "style" (i.e. accessible) is subsumed in our notion of degree of relevance of a knowledge-claim.

Finally, the *sustainability* or *time frame* of the research claims generated by a research inquiry within the context of a researcher's paradigm in use also has an important impact on the degree of relevance. This relates to the question: '*relevant when, and for how long?*' Relevance is clearly somewhat transient in nature, especially in the IS field. What is considered highly relevant now may be regarded as less or even not relevant within a relatively short time frame. The sustainability of knowledge claims in the form of theories and models can clearly have an enormous impact on how research is consumed and perceived by stakeholders. As Lewin [29, p. 169] correctly suggests, "nothing is more practical than a good theory"; the better our theories about IS phenomena, the greater their chance of having a long-term impact on IS practice.

4. Some key propositions

Based upon the conceptual framework elucidated in the previous section, it is possible to posit the following propositions. As discussed earlier, the goal of these propositions is to illustrate the proposed conceptual framework, provide a foundation for future research, and to provoke thought and/or to generate a reaction (in support or against) from the reader.

Proposition 1: *Notwithstanding philosophical rhetoric to the contrary, IS researchers operating under differing research paradigms are basically motivated to produce knowledge-claims that have applicability beyond the context of research.*

This proposition goes to the notion whether potential differences in relevance implicit in the rhetoric of each paradigm are valid. For example, based on Table 1 and

our discussion of Figure 1, it could be inferred that the research conducted under the critical theory paradigm will be most relevant for contributing towards the empowerment of end users. At the heart of the question of differences in degree of relevance implied by different research approaches, lies the issue of *generalizability* of the research results generated. Baskerville [2] discusses how the concept of generalizability in IS research has been restricted by a natural science research model, thus ruling out the potential value of research approaches that focus on unique settings, such as ethnographies, action research and interpretive case studies, to be applied to new problem settings. The limited acceptance of generalizability is reflected by the definition of generalizability as "a quality describing a theory that has been tested and confirmed in a variety of situations, whether such testing is conducted through case research, laboratory experiments, statistical experiments or natural experiments" [28, p. 41]. This corresponds to a nomothetic generalization [4]. Instead, Baskerville (op.cit) argues for an idiographic form of generalization, comprising a two-stage generalization process. Stage 1 involves the creation of a general case out of a base case, and stage 2 the application of the general case to the goal case, i.e. the application setting for the research findings. Stage 2 generalizations can thus be seen to complete the mapping process of the practitioner from experience onto new problem settings.

Walsham [40] also presents four different types of generalization from interpretive case studies: the development of concepts, the generation of theory, the drawing of specific implications, and the contribution of rich insight. According to this perspective, generalizations should be viewed as *tendencies* rather than predictions, i.e. as "explanations of particular phenomena derived from empirical interpretive research in specific IS settings, which may be valuable in the future in other organizations and contexts" (ibid. p. 79). Based on the 'weak' notion of generalizability implied in interpretive research, this type of research could be expected to be free of prescriptions regarding approaches for practice. However, when looking beyond the rhetoric applied, one actually finds that interpretive research may contain implications of an equally prescriptive nature as positivist research. An example of such prescription can be identified as part of the seminal work of Walsham [42], often cited as an exemplar interpretivist study. Although framed as 'issues for debate', several of the practical implications presented related to these issues can be seen to be of a prescriptive nature.

Positivist researchers working on the TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) have attempted to validate this model in different contexts and with different technologies [10, 11, 39]. However, this model belies one

fundamental ontological assumption in positivism—that the phenomenon under investigation must be observable by one's sense experiences (logical positivism). Clearly, concepts such as "perceived usefulness", "perceived ease of use" and "self-reported system usage" are terms that represent unobservable notions and their measurement is not direct, not unlike the study of signatures of electrons, quarks and other small particles in Quantum Physics.

Proposition 2: *Notwithstanding philosophical rhetoric to the contrary, no single research paradigm is implicitly more suited to producing knowledge-claims that have specific applicability to practice.*

This proposition is supported by the limiting definition of relevance proposed by mainstream IS researchers such as Benbasat and Zmud [3] who define relevant research as *one that is potentially useful for, as well as accessible by, ... IS professionals (including analysts, user representatives, and IS managers) as well as managers with an interest in information technology (IT) deployment and utilization*" (p. 4 & 12). Among their recommendations for attaining increased relevance, Benbasat and Zmud (op.cit.) list more contextual description and more prescription. The first can be seen to imply a bias for interpretive research; Similarly, the call for more prescriptions can be seen to encourage a positivist approach, as the rhetoric of interpretive research in general implies caution in presenting general prescriptions. However, as discussed earlier under Proposition 1, interpretive research studies may also contain implications of a prescriptive nature, although applying a different rhetoric (e.g., [42]). In this vein, it is clear that no single research approach has a monopoly on producing results that have direct relevance to practice.

Proposition 3: *Notwithstanding paradigmatic assumptions to the contrary, no single research paradigm is implicitly more suited to producing sustainable knowledge claims that have long-term impact on IS practice.*

This proposition addresses the question of whether the rhetoric of different paradigms supports the generation of sustainable theories and concepts or ephemeral theoretical notions that are valid in the immediate term. Clearly, there are two sides to this proposition. From one standpoint, it can be argued that certain research paradigms and their associated rhetoric are more amenable to producing relevant research than others. However, on the other hand, it is possible to ask whether there needs to be necessarily an implication for relevance (short- or long-term) based on researchers' paradigmatic orientations. Furthermore, multi-method or multi-paradigmatic research may (potentially) be better suited

for IS as a discipline and consequently produce significant implications for practice.

With the rapid pace of technological development in the IS field, the time window available to impact IS practice is often short and is even getting more compressed. This can be illustrated by the problem with many articles in major IS journals setting out to present 'novel implications' for implementation and use of 'emerging technologies', that actually already have become largely outdated by the time a submission makes it to publication. However, while this can be seen as a call for more short-term research, several authors argue that it is important to also maintain a long-term perspective to be able to contribute to practice in a proactive way [13].

5. Summary and implications

In this paper we have proposed a conceptual framework for assessing the impact of a researcher's philosophical framework on the purported degree of relevance. It provides an organized way of thinking about the status of our knowledge claims and their potential impact on the degree of relevance for various stakeholders. In addition, it indirectly raises the issue of whether there is a correspondence between the characteristics of the implicit and explicit rhetoric associated with key IS research paradigms and the actual relevance of the products of research to practice. Due to the difficulty of objectively assessing relevance to practice, the notion of perceived degree of relevance to stakeholder group is proposed as a predictor of actual relevance.

As stated in the introduction, rather than providing answers to these important questions, the goal of the framework and propositions developed in this paper is to stimulate further debate and reflection and provide a foundation for conducting further research on the question of how the 'paradigm in use' may impact the degree of relevance for different stakeholder groups and produce sustainable knowledge claims. It should be reiterated here that in this paper we just begin to scratch the surface of how IS research paradigms (espoused or those 'in use') impact relevance of our knowledge claims. Thus, the notion of which criteria would be useful in assessing the impact for different stakeholders is not directly addressed and needs to be further developed in terms of the validity and nature/contribution of knowledge claims under each research paradigm.

To further address the issues raised in this paper, the authors plan to conduct a survey among IS academics and researchers with the goal to map the relationship between the espoused paradigms guiding the respondents' research, the type of research being conducted, and the intended audience of this research. However, to also be able to study the 'paradigms in use' and the relationship to the

espoused paradigms requires an analysis of exemplar research produced under different research paradigms. A general challenge in this endeavor is the wide variety of research perspectives in use in IS research today. In this paper we have applied a broad classification of IS research into three key paradigms. However, in practice there are other research paradigms (e.g., "realism") and, in many instances, a continuum of adaptations to these paradigms at the level of the individual researchers [32]. For any analysis to be complete one would need to take all these variations into account. Still, we believe that it is possible to identify researchers and studies that represent the core assumptions of these different paradigms. Through analyzing the products of this type of research effort, it may be possible to generate an insight into IS research that goes beyond the 'espoused paradigms' and related rhetoric, and instead focuses on current research practice and the resulting impact on relevance for different stakeholder groups. By doing this, we may be able to move on from the more meta-theoretical discussions characterizing the current debate on relevance, to the important issue of how we as IS researchers can produce research results that are of most value and accessibility to the different consumers or stakeholder groups.

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