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# Methodological Nature and Epistemological bases of Qualitative Studies in Marketing

By Janaína Gularte Cardoso, Kleiton Luiz Nascimento Reis, Martin de La Martiniere Petroll & Rudimar Antunes da Rocha

*Universidade Federal de Santa*

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*Keywords: epistemology, qualitative research, marketing, epistemology in marketing.*

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# Methodological Nature and Epistemological bases of Qualitative Studies in Marketing

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## I. Introduction

Epistemology is a field of knowledge that elaborates a critical discourse on the sciences (SERVA, 2014). Lima, Kraemer and Rossi (2014), when investigating the epistemological discussion in marketing, emphasize the importance of these studies, as they promote the development of theories in marketing, as well as a critical evaluation of the discipline's theories and the production of pragmatic knowledge. It should also be noted that the hegemonic paradigm in marketing is positivism and its functional-structuralist derivations. Furthermore, the inclusion of categories generated in other fields such as psychology, anthropology, neuroscience, does not mean an epistemological rupture within the discipline, but instrumentalization for empirical verification, maintaining the positivist approach (LIMA, KRAEMER and ROSSI, 2014).

As a result, it can be conjectured that specific epistemological analyses, such as in the field of marketing, envisage a critical debate that allows reviewing its foundations, its methods, revealing its paradigms and the structure of its field; allow understanding the set of assumptions on which research in the area is based, promoting a reflective analysis.

The legitimacy of quantitative research in studies in the field of marketing can be understood from its relationship with positivist thinking, which still predominates in the area. This statement is corroborated by Motta and Iizuka (2016) who, when analyzing the *Journal of Marketing* publications, found that the methodology used in the area is predominantly quantitative. Following this perspective, marketing as a scientific discipline is anchored in the logical-empiricist paradigm, in which it seeks to prove the consistency of its studies through statistical models, measurements and validity criteria (SCUSSEL, 2017).

Arndt (1985) points out that marketing follows an empiricist logic that values rationality, objectivity, measurement, and neglects alternative research approaches. This prerogative seems to have been maintained over time, as stated by Castro Junior et al. (2015), logical empiricism is the dominant paradigm within the evolution of marketing thinking. And yet, as evidenced by Lima et al. (2014), the vast majority of research published in the most important marketing *journals is empirical in nature.* Furthermore, the objection regarding marketing does not refer to its form or content, but to its method (BOAVA and MACEDO, 2012).

This situation perpetuates the quantitative *versus* qualitative debate that, on the one hand, calls for the need for qualitative studies that help the researcher to understand the complexity of the phenomena; and, on the other hand, defends quantitative studies and their objectivity as the best way to explain the world (CASTRO JÚNIOR et al., 2015).

The search for recognition of studies with qualitative bases establishes, in the field of marketing, a methodological debate that has as its backdrop the belief in a dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research that, for Vieira (2004), is false. In this controversy, the defense of the superiority of quantitative research prevails over qualitative research, arising from its supposed objectivity and greater scientific rigor.

Furthermore, according to Diniz et al. (2016), studies focused on the critical approach are incipient and distanced from marketing theory. Particularly in the

*Author α ρ ω: Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.*
*e-mails: janaina.gularte.cardoso@ufsc.br, martin.petroll@ufsc.br, rrudimar@hotmail.com*
*Author σ: Programa de Pós-Graduação em Engenharia e Gestão do Conhecimento da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.*
*e-mail: kleitonluiz.reis@gmail.com*



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area of marketing, in which complex social, behavioral and marketing phenomena are investigated, as well as issues directly related to social well-being, such as ideological, hegemonic, gender and ethical issues; the wealth brought by qualitative research is necessary. In the field of marketing, there are many reasons to use critical and qualitative research, such as achieving understanding of particular reasons and social phenomena, understanding consumers' preference for brands, discovering underlying motivations, developing an initial understanding of a problem, among others (CAHILL, 1998, DINIZ et al., 2016).

Therefore, critical studies in marketing are important, mainly due to two aspects: the function of marketing is the one that most interacts with society; and the exclusion of marketing from critical discussions constitutes a harmful and alienated practice, notably with regard to the ideological and economic consequences for society (MARANHÃO; PAES DE PAULA, 2012). In the same sense, non-reductionist studies are essential, which have as their object the effects of marketing as a social practice (TADAJEWSKI; BROWNLIE, 2008).

When conjecturing that the conventional epistemological bases have a direct approach to quantitative studies and the non-conventional ones to qualitative studies, the question remains whether there is an effort to suggest alternative paradigms to positivism for research in marketing. In the meantime, another question arises: are qualitative studies in marketing anchored in the critical and/or constructivist paradigm or do they maintain close approximations with the positivist paradigm? It is also questioned what are the epistemological bases and what is the methodological rigor of research of a qualitative nature in marketing?

To help with reflection, the present work aims to analyze how qualitative research is constructed in articles published in the Revista Brasileira de Marketing – ReMark, in the period of 2018, based on conventional and unconventional epistemologies.

ReMark aims to promote Brazilian scientific production in the field of marketing. The choice of said magazine is justified by the fact that it is focused on the Marketing area, and is, among the four specific Revista Brasileira de Marketing, the one with the best classification in 2021 by the Qualis/CAPES system – Plataforma Sucupira, B1. Despite the Qualis classification, the aforementioned magazine has prestige and *status* in the national academic environment, in particular, related to marketing.

Added to this is the fact that in 2018 the Journal launched two special editions, one of which specifically deals with the state of the art of marketing research. Among the works published in this issue are contributions that broaden the debates on the impact and challenges that marketing research will have to face in the coming decades to continue contributing to academia and the market. One of them is the article by Hair, Harrison and Risher (2018), for whom the marketing function has changed rapidly and the analysis methods used by researchers in the field are also changing due to changes in management skills, technological innovations and the consumer behavior. Also according to Hair, Harrison and Risher (2018), these advances have directed marketing research towards the use of increasingly quantitative methods, such as the use of *big data* and artificial intelligence.

Moreover, this work is part of the discussion about epistemologies, scientific rigor and the particular aspects of qualitative research. Guided by the aforementioned questions, it is characterized as a documentary research. For this purpose, the epistemological assumptions of the conventional and non-conventional bases will be used as criteria and the classification of qualitative studies according to the research strategy, data collection techniques, as well as the form of data analysis.

## II. Epistemological Bases

The concept of epistemology is used flexibly and serves to designate either a general theory of knowledge or more restricted studies, questioning the genesis of the structure of science; thus constituting an interdisciplinary discipline character (JAPIASSU, 1991). Given the importance of epistemological reflection on the construction of knowledge in the most diverse areas of knowledge, but especially in Marketing, it is up to the researcher to apprehend his object of study, in such a way that he is able to legitimize an epistemological posture that solidly supports their conceptions.

With such reflections in mind and observing the various epistemological positions, it can be noted that science is not static, quite the contrary, it is dynamic. Like the world, nature, society and people, it undergoes several changes, transforming itself in the course of History; it influences and is influenced by the context, by behaviors and revolutions, it changes and is modified. Scientific knowledge has evolved throughout history, and new possibilities for doing science arise every day.

In the field of investigation of Administration phenomena, Martins (1994) presents conventional and non-conventional epistemological conceptions. The conventional ones are based on positivism, while the non-conventional ones are based on dialectical and historical materialism. Martins (1997), considering the classification suggested by Triviños, propose the following typology: empiricist-positivists, phenomenological-hermeneutics and dialectical critics, with systemic and functionalist approaches being treated in the empiricist-positivist block.

The following briefly presents the epistemological currents that will serve as the basis for

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the analysis of this research: conventional basis (positivism, functionalism and systemic) and unconventional basis (critical theory).

In a simplistic way, the conventional basis has positivism and the empiricist-systemic-functionalist approach as its central assumption. These are studies based on empirical data, analyzed quantitatively with objectivity and neutrality, in which, based on a theoretical framework, the researcher usually raises hypotheses and tests them.

The unconventional basis is anti-positivist. It is based, therefore, on the use of dialectical logic and is focused on the emancipatory interest. Non-conventional methodological approaches use, more frequently, qualitative analyses. They are researching that start from the social reality in its complexity, totality, and then build appropriate methods to capture and transform it. The apprehension of the subjects is a basic characteristic, based on historical and social aspects. The main strategy is comprehension and interpretation.

In order to carry out the analysis, the analytical categories that follow in Chart 1 were structured. It should be noted that the summary presented is the result of the literature used, namely: Padovani and Castagnola (1990); Bentham (1979); Demo (1985); Triviños (1987); Popper (1980); Paes de Paula (2016); Durkheim (1978); Evans-Pritchard (1972); Radcliffe-Brown (1973); Malinowski (1970); Chanlat and Séguin (1987a, 1987b); Kast and Rosenzweig (1992); Parsons (1967); Foulquié (1978); Gurvitch (1987); Lefebvre (1983); Benson (1983); Gamboa (1987; 1997); Martins (1994; 1997); Faria (2007); Guba and Lincoln (1994).

*Table 1:* Epistemological Bases

| | Bases Epistemológicas | Pontos Centrais | Caracterização Geral | Características Metodológicas |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Base convencional | Positivismo | Explicar e predizer o que acontece no mundo social por meio de regularidades e relacionamentos causais entre os seus elementos constituintes | Utiliza como técnica de investigação os estudos descritivos, estabelecimento de causalidade e relações entre variáveis e fatos. É orientado por planos amostrais, estruturados, com a utilização de questionários fechados, experimentos, e análise estatística de dados. | Se utiliza, com maior frequência, do delineamento quantitativo. Estratégia de pesquisa: experimentos e levantamentos. Técnica de coleta de dados estruturada como questionários e escalas. Uso da estatística na busca da objetividade científica. Trabalha com variáveis (dependentes e independentes); operacionalização de conceitos e generalizações. |
| | Funcionalismo | Concepção sistêmica, sincrônica, teleológica, a-histórica, integradora e harmônica. | Apoiado em técnicas descritivas. Envolve análises e avaliações de papéis, funcionamento das organizações, avaliação, planejamento etc. A causalidade é concebida como a explicação do para quê dos fenômenos ou da lógica entre proposta e ação. Relação funcional entre o todo e as partes. | |
| | Sistemismo | Privilegia a síntese e a visão da totalidade. Aspecto relacional. Sistema aberto e em interação com o meio. | Utiliza o método hipotético dedutivo e técnicas descritivas para avaliar programas, métodos e afins. A causalidade é entendida através da lógica do inter-relacionamento de subsitemas com suas entredas, processos e saídas. | |
| Base Não Convencional | Teoria Crítica | Abordagem humanística do ato de pesquisar. Questiona o *status quo* procurando compreender os sujeitos e suas relações sociais. Almeja uma construção coletiva da realidade e da história. Investe contra o individualismo, mas instrumentaliza e conscientiza indivíduos para compreensão das necessidades da sociedade enquanto grupo. Fundamenta-se em critérios específicos para análise social. | É principalmente antipositivista. Pesquisas críticas exigem um esquema teórico-metodológico dialético. O pesquisador deve buscar estabelecer diálogo dialético com o objeto investigado. Busca a racionalização e conscientização coletiva. Não exclui os métodos quantitativos, mas ressalta a importância da análise qualitativa dos dados, a partir da revisão história e social que circunda o objeto. | Se utiliza, com maior frequência, do delineamento qualitativo. Estratégia de pesquisa: pesquisa etnográfica, pesquisa participante, pesquisa-ação, pesquisa naturalística, pesquisa histórica, *grounded theory*, análise crítica do discurso e pesquisa documental. Técnicas de coleta de dados: estudo de casos, entrevista em profundidade, entrevista de grupo, entrevista não-diretiva, observação participante, história de vida e análise documental. Forma de análise dos dados baseadas no discurso, conteúdo e/ou narrativa. |

*Source: Prepared by the Authors (2021).*



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Once the analytical categories referring to the epistemological bases have been defined, it is worth noting that, when reviewing the literature on qualitative research, one can notice that, frequently, this research is not being defined by itself, but in contrast to quantitative research. Therefore, Bryman (1988) observes the differences and similarities between qualitative and quantitative research. From the point of view of the researcher's relationship with the research subject, quantitative research is distant and neutral, while in qualitative research the researcher knows the space and lives the time experienced by the investigated. Thus, the qualitative researcher interacts with the researched object/subject, with the intention of giving it a voice and building a plot of meanings. For this, the researcher's worldview is part of the investigative process, and it is impossible to detach oneself from it. This dialectical process is inductive, makes generalization lose strength for discovery and standardized language is freed and evolves to new narrative possibilities, which seek to integrate a scheme of multiple voices (GERGEN; GERGEN, 2006).

As for the image of social reality, the quantitative approach is characterized as static and external to the actor, and the qualitative, procedural and socially constructed by the subjects. The objective of quantitative research is to explain and predict (establishing causal relationships and/or testing hypotheses) and qualitative research is to understand, describe and characterize (at most, point out association relationships) (BRYMAN; 1988).

The subjects, from a quantitative perspective, must be sufficient to guarantee representativeness; on the other hand, in the qualitative one, all people who elaborate knowledge and/or produce adequate practices to intervene in the problems object of the research are considered. The central quantitative concern is statistical validation and the scope of the findings is nomothetic, that is, it intends to generalize; the qualitative focuses on understanding the meanings and the scope of the findings is ideographic, as it treats each individual as a unique universe. Furthermore, the quantitative data collection strategies are structured and the technique for dealing with them is statistics; on the other hand, qualitative research has unstructured and semi-structured strategies and the treatment of data aims at the meaning of the contents (BRYMAN; 1988).

## III. Methodological Paths

ReMark, according to the electronic library SPELL (2021), has 789 citations, 812,398 accesses, 165,809 downloads, 551 available documents and an H: 9 index. The types of texts published are: theoretical and theoretical-empirical scientific articles, in Spanish, English and Portuguese.

The Journal is published quarterly, is of an academic nature, publishing articles that are the result of scientific research, which must necessarily bring an innovative theoretical or empirical contribution to the area of Marketing knowledge. In addition, there is a deliberate position to publish articles by all research groups in the country, privileging researchers from regions in the consolidation phase and encouraging joint production. It is characterized by being aimed at a broad, highly qualified public that works in the marketing area in public, private and third sector, national and international organizations. The article evaluation process is characterized by a triple evaluation system and involves two sequential steps: the *desk review* and the evaluation by the reviewers (ReMark, 2020).

Its focus is the publication of scientific contributions in the following areas: research methods and theory in marketing; consumer behavior; marketing management and strategy; and marketing in specific contexts.

The next step was to define the criteria for classification, evaluation and analysis of the articles, structuring the documentary research in three stages. First step: a) reading the articles in full: b) classification of the articles according to the type of research (quantitative, qualitative, quali-quantitative and essay) and; c) elimination of articles classified as quantitative research, quali-quantitative and essay. Second stage: a) evaluation of qualitative research according to the research strategy (case study, multicase, documentary, ethnographic, *grounded theory*, action research and participant); b) evaluation of qualitative research according to the data collection technique (interview, observation, document analysis and focus group); and c) evaluation according to the data analysis method (discourse analysis, content analysis and narrative analysis) (BRYMAN, 1988; SANDELOWSKI, 1997; ALVES-MAZZOTTI and GEWANDSNAJDER, 1999; DENZIN and LINCOLN, 2006; BANDEIRA DE MELLO, 2006; CHUEKE and LIMA, 2012). Third stage – analysis: a) content analysis according to the epistemological bases and analytical categories specified in Table 1.

For the purposes of analysis, this identification was achieved based on the objective of each work, the analysis of the methodological procedures explained and through the detailed reading of each article, as well as the way in which the data were presented and analyzed, which made clear the nature that the authors give to their investigation, even if implicitly. From this, a survey of the Journal's publications was carried out in the period of 2018, where the publication of four annual editions was identified. In the first three, ten articles were published each, and in the last, twelve articles were published. Of the total of forty-two articles published, five are of a qualitative nature, twenty-eight are quantitative, five are characterized as both qualitative

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and quantitative, and four are theoretical essays. That said, the object of study of this article were the five identified qualitative articles.

It is pertinent to add that, in the year 2018, ReMark published two special editions. The first, entitled "Marketing Research: the state of the art and next steps", consists entirely of theoretical essays. And the second, in which twelve articles were published, of these 4 qualitative ones. These were not considered in this research for two reasons: they deal with themes alluding to certain theoretical perspectives and, as a result, they may be directed and aligned with certain epistemological bases and/or methodological assumptions, which could cause biases in the analysis proposed here.

## IV. Analysis of the Methodological Nature and Epistemological Basis

This section aims to investigate the methodological nature and basic epistemological bases of the articles under analysis. Initially, each article was assessed separately, through the study of each work in full. Next, the analysis highlights the objective and methodological nature, pointing out the research strategy, the collection technique and the way of data analysis, together with the observation of the predominant epistemological bases.

Article 1 establishes that the central purpose of the research is "to investigate the relationship between brand love and the direct sales professional of a global cosmetics brand" (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p.19, emphasis added). It is observed in the passage of the text, an approximation with the conventional epistemological bases, mainly the systemic one, since this advocates the relational aspect.

Also, there is the statement that the "emotional meanings of a *brand love* of the consultants of a global cosmetics brand were identified" (Ibid., p. 20, emphasis added). The plot of meanings, according to Gerfen and Geren (2006), is a characteristic of qualitative research.

The study also sought to investigate whether the feelings and emotions identified in the research coincide between consultants *from two Latin American countries* (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p.20, emphasis added). The comparative analysis of phenomena in different cultures, according to Malinowski (1970), was developed from functionalism. Thus, there is a certain approximation with the functionalist assumptions.

The research strategy used was *the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET).* A qualitative research technique for understanding consumer *behavior that investigates the mental models that drive thinking and behavior.behavior*__through storytelling, analyzing non-literal expressions [...] (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p. 20, emphasis added). It is worth noting that behavior is an implicit occurrence related to Durkheim's (1978) social fact. The social fact has strength and imposes a set of reactions on the individual, as a dynamic system in the face of interactions and renewal provided by the environment in which he is involved. Thus, the research strategy used presents an epistemological posture aligned with functionalism.

Sampling by quota was used, as this provides for the "classification of the population according to the relevant characteristics for obtaining the objectives proposed in the research, in such a way that the total sample can contain the proportion of each stratum, aiming to guarantee the minimum of *representativeness"* (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p. 21, emphasis added). Hence, quantitative and functionalist characteristics are inferred; functionalists, given the ahistorical conception in the selection of subjects (EVANS-PRITCHARD, 1972; CHANLAT and SÉGUIN, 1987b), which was based exclusively on representativeness, the focus of quantitative research.

Data collection was operationalized according to the ZMET protocol, which uses images that can represent the feelings and thoughts about the researched topic, followed by the application of in-depth interviews. "The dealerships were asked to look for 10 images that could *represent their feelings and thoughts* on the researched topic" (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p.22, emphasis added). Understanding meanings, such as images *versus* feelings and thoughts, is an aspect of qualitative research (BRYMAN; 1988). And in-depth interviews are more usual on unconventional epistemological bases. However, when evaluating the form of operationalization and analysis of the interviews, an emphasis is observed on the general frequency and on the weighted percentage of words, in view of which one can verify the predominance of the positivist paradigm (PADOVANI and CASTAGNOLA, 1990; DEMO, 1985; TRIVIÑOS, 1987).

The form of data analysis used was the consensus map based on the most cited words in the interviews. To carry out this, the NVivo software was used, designed to organize information into un-structured or qualitative data. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the results and discussions shows that most of the data was presented in the form of tables with percentages, maps, according to the frequency of occurrence of the answers, confirming that the most prominent epistemological bases in the research are the conventional ones.

Article 2 "aimed at *analyzing the strategies used* by companies in the management of online complaints and proposed an *effective management model"* (RÍMOLI and MELO, 2018, p. 49, emphasis added).

The authors point out that the objective and methodology of the research were the following: to analyze the online complaints received regarding the



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company's Lojas Americanas, Magazine Luiza, Submarino and Ponto Frio and how they behave in the face of these posts, in order to propose a model of *effective* management of complaints online. For this, a *descriptive research* was carried out through the *content analysis* of 379 online consumer complaints posted on the ReclameAQUI website (Ibid., p. 50, emphasis added).

In view of this, one perceives the influence of conventional and non-conventional epistemological bases. As for the conventional ones, these assumptions are closely related to functionalism and the systemic, functionalist approach, as it involves analysis of the strategies used and systemic in terms of input *and* output *analyzes* and the proposition of an effective model (PARSONS, 1976; CHANLAT and SÉGUIN, 1987b). The unconventional bases are portrayed through content analysis.

It is characterized as a qualitative, descriptive research, with the site reclameaqui.com.br as the basis for data collection, in which, through documentary research, analyzes of the management of complaints by companies in relation to claimants were carried out. As for the classification of the research, the authors define it as "descriptive, that is, that seeks to *describe* the particularities of a population or phenomenon, and may also *define relationships between the variables present* (RÍMOLI and MELO, 2018, p. 53, emphasis added). The description of the phenomenon characterizes the research as qualitative, however, the descriptive techniques are also typical of conventional epistemological bases, and defining the relationships between variables brings the study even closer to conventional bases (PAES DE PAULA, 2016; CHANLAT and SÉGUIN, 1987a, 1987b; KAST and ROSENZWEIG, 1992).

The configuration given to data collection for documentary research is close to that proposed by Bryman (1988) for qualitative research, because: *the ideal number* of published complaints *is how much the researcher thinks is enough*_to discover and verify what he is looking for. The intention, therefore, *was not to obtain a significant sample* of a population, but rather *to choose complaints with the greatest potential to provide the desired information,* (RÍMOLI and MELO, 2018, p. 53, emphasis added).

Data analysis was performed through content analysis of the collected data. The study of textual transcripts of data was carried out, following the steps below: clipping contents, definition of analytical categories and final categorization of units of analysis. The NVivo11 software was used for content analysis. Therefore, there is an approximation to the unconventional bases, portrayed in documentary research and content analysis.

However, when analyzing the results and discussions chapter, it can be seen that the entire discussion is predominantly based on percentages and indices, such as, for example, "main reasons for complaints and the percentage of each in relation to the total" *and* "the *main causes* of complaints in the stores surveyed", "the *number, in percentage,* of complainants who had their problems resolved" (Ibid., p. 54-58, emphasis added), confirming the influence of conventional epistemologies.

At the end, when proposing the model, there is a qualitative analysis of the information gathered during the research, and based on these, it was "possible to develop and *propose an effective model* for management [...]" (RÍMOLI and MELO, 2018, p. 59, emphasis added). The fact that the proposition of a model presupposes limits and limits is a feature of functionalism. Furthermore, the intention of generating a previously expected result, that is, in a prescriptive way, and the utilitarian logic of this, reinforces support on conventional bases.

Continuing with the analyses, throughout the introduction of Article 3, some questions are found that indicate the epistemological bases that underpin the study, which are:

1. The objective of this work is to *analyze the relationship* between integrated marketing communication and its advantages for companies with a differentiation strategy via the franchising process. It can be shown that there is *greater potential for success* in marketing communication when franchising companies position marketing communication in the *strategic instance* (QUEIROZ et al. 2018, p. 265, emphasis added).
2. "We are *proposing* a series of factors that should be considered to guide retail companies in building this *link* between current value and value creation" (QUEIROZ et al. 2018, p. 267, emphasis added).
3. *"To propose a conceptual model* that will assist in the planning of companies' marketing communication, involving the evaluation of results" (QUEIROZ et al. 2018, p. 268, emphasis added).

Assertion a) is in line with conventional bases, and the establishment of causality and relationships between variables and facts indicates the domain of positivism, the analysis of the relationship and evaluation are based on functionalism and systemic, the emphasis on the process is based on the systemic question, the success function refers to functionalism, and the teleological conception of the strategic instance refers to functionalism. The factors highlighted in b) and c) refer to the functionalist and systemic approaches (GAMBOA, 1987 and 1997; MARTINS, 1994 and 1997).

It is characterized as a qualitative research, study of multiple cases, application of in-depth



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interview, and data analysis based on triangulation. "The survey was carried out in more than one company, thus ensuring greater depth in the issues [...] and robustness in the data analysis" (QUEIROZ et al. 2018, p. 268, emphasis added). This prerogative, supported by the use of in-depth interviews, constitute precepts that confirm the performance of a qualitative research. Furthermore, the in-depth interview and the content analysis logic of the triangulation are supported by critical epistemological postures.

However, what is actually observed is the expressiveness of conventional scientific foundations, as evidenced in the following explanation:

The presented case studies A and B formed the basis of our current work, through the development of a *comparative synthesis* of the marketing communication planning *process and the mechanisms for evaluating* the contribution of marketing communication at the point of sale in companies that use the franchise format for marketing and *building relationships* with their consumers (Ibid., p. 269, emphasis added).

The issue of comparative synthesis, according to Gamboa (1987; 1997), is one of the criteria of dialectical scientific, as it is based on the internal logic of synthesis; however, the synthesis and the vision of the totality are also systemic prerogatives, Demo (1985), and, on this occasion, one perceives more inference from the systemic approach than the dialectical one.

Furthermore, a tenuous critical nuance is inferred, as a dialectical dialogue with the investigated object is lacking (GUBA; LINCOLN, 1994), as well as a historical and social review of the analyzed cases.

After analyzing the data, the authors propose a conceptual model of integrated marketing communication. The development of the model follows stages of planning, development, implementation and control. Thus, a logic that emphasizes functionality, rationality and measurement is confirmed, and an instrumentalization that brings research closer to systemic-functionalist-positivism.

The penultimate article analyzed, Article 4, defines that the objective of the research is "to ascertain the involvement of users in relation to smartphone ownership and to verify whether it represents an extension of the user's self. We also sought to identify paradoxical perceptions regarding this mobile technology" (MARTINS, OLIVEIRA and CORSO, 2018, p. 329). These relations between subject and object, between knowledge and action, between theory and practice (MARTINS, 1994; 1997) underline an approximation with dialectics, and, consequently, with critical theory, since the use of a dialectical theoretical-methodological scheme is a feature of critical theory (FARIA, 2007).

*Of self* and extended *self,* information technologies and technological paradoxes are discussed. A considerable part of the theoretical foundation focuses on the question of the *self,* formulated by Belk in 1988 and reformulated in 2013 and 2014. Belk's assumptions present an epistemological posture aligned with functionalist thinking, since the theory of the *self* (I) emphasizes that goods, things and places are identified as parts that constitute the individual's I and, as parts, they have different functions. It also approaches a systemic view, since the author highlights the parts as important constituents of something bigger, in this case, the Self. Thus, a systemic view is emphasized, similar to that defended by Demo (1985). The authors also carry out a historical review of the development of the theory of the *self,* thus inferring nuances of a critical stance (GUBA; LINCOLN, 1994).

The methodological procedures are defined as qualitative in nature, with a sample by accessibility, conducting in-depth interviews, using the technique of content analysis. Consequently, the design brings the study closer to unconventional epistemological bases.

After reading the characterization of the method, as well as the discussions presented in the work, it can be observed that the qualitative nature corresponds to the problem and objective of the research. However, despite the description of the format and participants of the interviews, there is no identification of the time, which makes it difficult to measure the depth or not. Furthermore, the content analysis technique is operationalized in a deep and reflective way, and the categories used for the organization, analysis and interpretation of this material were defined.

According to Faria (2007) and Tadajewski and Brownie (2008), critical contributions are reflective, guided and grounded through the following categories: contradictions, dominant ideology, dominant rationalities, historical social context, individual and collective emancipation and awareness, ontological denaturalization, epistemological reflexivity and non-performative posture. Therefore, the study is characterized as analogous and inspired by critical theory, given the reflective analysis, but it is not configured as a critical study itself (Critical*Marketing)*, because the categories used and the breadth of analysis are not consistent with the critical theory.

Finally, Article 5 has as its main objective: to identify the incidence of *greenwash* in the *supposedly sustainable actions* of organizations of personal hygiene care products, perfumery and cosmetics, called *beauty care.* More specifically, "to analyze the *discrepancies between the discourse and practices of companies* that are part of the Brazilian *beauty care context,* based on the focus on eco-innovation" (SILVA, SCHERER and PIVETTA, 2018, p. 503, emphasis added).



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As a result, dialectical and, consequently, critical nuances can be inferred, as it is based on the dynamic conception of reality and in the dialectical relationships between theory (in this case, the supposedly affirmed and the discourse) and practice. The dialectical method seeks to locate contradictions and privileges experiences, actions and a contextualized analysis (MARTINS, 1994; 1997; GURVITCH, 1987). Furthermore, critical theory has the totality of social praxis as a central dimension for dialectical criticism, as opposed to the logic of systemic functioning proper to positivism (FREITAG, 1986).

It should be noted that the term *greenwashing* is "used to define the discourse that seeks to promote a positive environmental image that does not correspond to reality". (SILVA, SCHERER and PIVETTA, 2018, p. 504). It is a concept that must be investigated within a complex context, and, at the same time, establishes and points out possible contradictions among the investigated phenomena. Such a perspective is characterized as dialectical and critical, and as a totalizing and dialectical understanding, it is capable of making contradictions emerge (FARIA, 2007).

The authors define the work methodology as exploratory, descriptive, of a qualitative nature, developed through a documentary analysis of secondary data, through the use of a data collection protocol (a script provided the direction for mapping practices). The exploratory, qualitative nature and document analysis are inserted in an unconventional epistemological context, while the descriptive design and a structured data collection script tend to be configured as a conventional epistemological posture.

Different sources of evidence based on secondary data obtained through institutional documents and corporate websites were used. Complemented by press information, based on news and pressure entities on the *greenwash effects* related to the selected companies. There was also a survey of data based on consultations about the personal hygiene, perfumery and cosmetics sector in documents, mainly in reports and panoramas of the Brazilian Association of Personal Hygiene, Perfumery and Cosmetics Industry (ABIHPEC), data available at the Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services (MDIC), industry overview developed by the National Development Bank (BNDES), reports and regulations on the sector available by the National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA) (SILVA, SCHERER and PIVETTA, 2018). The use of these bibliographical and documentary techniques, with research in texts, records and empirical data, prioritizing the analysis of discourse and/or content configures the study as critical-dialectic, according to Martins (1997).

In addition, for the analysis and discussion of the results, a comparative mapping was carried out and Bardin's content analysis technique was used. The study's findings have several implications for society, for management, for consumers and for the development of public policies, among others. However, a more accurate reading of the chapter on the analysis and discussion of the results demonstrates a much more descriptive logic of the data, rather than a deep and reflective one. The critical-dialectical influence is present (relationships between man and nature, between reflection-action and between theory-practice, in methodological procedures), however, nuances of conventional epistemologies are also perceived.

## V. Discussion

The first point to be highlighted is the primacy of quantitative studies compared to those that used qualitative techniques. From the survey carried out, of the total of forty-two articles published, only five are of a qualitative nature.

As for the paradigms that anchor the methodological procedures, the predominance of the conventional basis can be verified; this encourages the development of research of a dialectical, constructivist, interpretive and critical nature, which would open space for a more effective and broader understanding of the most subjective dimensions in understanding consumer behavior and consumption processes. In view of this, Scussel (2017) states that the interpretivist perspective in marketing research represents an incipient, but well-founded, revolution in the understanding of the area's processes, and critical studies signal an expansion of research horizons.

Despite the relatively small number of qualitative studies in the field of marketing, another issue that arises is how they are constructed and what methodological rigor is adopted. Thus, the analysis regarding the research strategies used and their coherence with the objectives of the work and the corresponding epistemological basis, showed a certain vulnerability, since, in many cases, such correspondence is not specified, nor evident and/or justified.

As for the data collection techniques, these demonstrated that the structure, the form of application and selection of subjects are not sufficiently explained. It should be noted that both the in-depth interview and the document analysis have requirements that configure them as such and are essential for the development of qualitative research. The non-explicitness of these requirements raises doubts about the methodological paths related to the instruments.

With regard to the form of data analysis, the method is often indicated in methodological procedures, however, it was observed that in the analysis of results this method is not properly operationalized, demonstrating the prominence of

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numerical/quantitative analyses, rather than based on in-depth and reflective methodological techniques. It is also relevant to point out the superficiality in the way in which the data are discussed, as the depth in the understanding of the phenomenon in its empirical reality is the focus and the final objective of qualitative research.

In addition, a detailed observation about the coherence between the epistemological bases, the methodology and the results obtained indicated inconsistency, mainly regarding the methods of data collection, data analysis and the way of presenting and discussing the results. The critical posture built in the process of discussing the results of the research allowed the verification of methodological fragility in the analyzed works.

Despite the fact that all analyzed articles (5) are characterized as qualitative, three of the five works are closer to traditional epistemological bases, with a predominance of functionalist and systemic approaches; although the methodological nature often presents nuances of unconventional epistemological bases.

The other two articles, specifically s 4 and 5, despite being inspired by critical theory, are not configured as critical studies in the strict sense (Critical *Marketing)*, as they do not broadly appropriate the general categories that characterize, guide and support the analysis of that theory. The grammar of critical marketing is characterized by theoretical and methodological pluralism surrounded by three commitments: ontological denaturalization, epistemological reflexivity and a non-performative posture (TADAJEWSKI; BROWNLIE, 2008). Furthermore, critical marketing researchers must emphasize the development of a systematic critique of social conditions; question the assumptions of the dominant social paradigm that sustain the marketing system (FIRAT; TADAJEWSKI, 2013). These factors were not observed in the aforementioned articles.

Another interesting aspect, identified in the two works that are aligned with the unconventional epistemological base, is that the approach to critical theory and critical marketing is limited; often circumscribed in methodological characteristics, but not in the research as a whole. To configure them in a critical-dialectical context, studies should be centered: (a) on the inclusion of a historical, critical and emancipatory perspective; (b) in the sociological understanding of human life and marketing itself; (c) in the use of investigation methods different from the traditional ones coming from the natural sciences, capable of examining certain meanings emanating from the social world, which could be captured with the use, for example, of ethnographic research, grounded theory, life history, *among* others; and (d) decontextualize and reconceptualizing the analytical categories and constructs of the field of marketing (BURTON, 2001); and in overcoming the current limits of marketing studies.

According to Tadajewski and Brownie (2008), criticizing the theory and practice of marketing must be done through a continuous process of analysis of assumptions and reassessment of the values in which marketing is anchored. Research based on critical theory assumes that social reality is a social fact, however individual consciousness is dominated and subservient to ideological superstructures, where criticism has the ultimate goal of stimulating positive social transformation. Critical marketing studies must include alternative themes and phenomena to the dominant paradigm.

In this sense, Firat and Tadajewski (2010) warn of three "fronts" that can be worked on when thinking about critical marketing. The first one has to do with that position in which the body of speeches is evaluated in order to find flaws or problems that can be modified or corrected in a given marketing strategy. Another way of thinking about criticisms of marketing is to bring to the discussion the perspective of the Frankfurt School known as Critical Theory. Finally, a third approach would be to discuss the approach based on the broader political, economic and social system – modern capitalism.

The search for this reference involves hard research work, since the concern with epistemology and methodology must be constant in any scientific work, in order to avoid misunderstandings.

## VI. Final Considerations

Reflecting on the epistemological bases makes it possible to apprehend a totality of elements on which research is based; makes it possible to unveil its objects, contours, methods, allowing a more critical look. Moreover, it is important for the researcher to take ownership of his object of study, in such a way that he is able to legitimize an epistemological posture that supports his conceptions.

In the field of Marketing, a number of authors claim that the hegemonic paradigm is positivism and the superiority of quantitative research prevails. Under this approach, the present work aimed to analyze how research of a qualitative nature is constructed in the articles published in the Revista Brasileira de Marketing – ReMark, in the period of 2018, based on conventional and unconventional epistemologies.

The critical evaluation of the construction of the methodological nature of the analyzed qualitative researches signaled a certain inconsistency, mainly regarding the way of analyzing the data; there is a certain divergence between the way of analyzing the data proposed in the articles, and the way in which the



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data are effectively analyzed and presented in the results and discussions.

Of the set of five articles analyzed, three have a strong emphasis on the conventional basis and have positivism and the empiricist-systemic-functionalist approach as their central assumption; corroborating the thesis that the dominant paradigm in marketing is logical-empiricist. This panorama is ratified by Arndt (1985), Lima et al. (2014), Castro Junior et al. (2015), Motta and Iizuka (2016) and Scussel (2017).

However, studies influenced by non-traditional epistemological bases point to the emergence of critically oriented studies. However, they are still approaches to critical theory, rather than actual critical studies.

By way of conclusion, it is worth noting that constructivist, critical and interpretive studies in marketing are still incipient in relation to the number of traditional studies, as well as being marginalized/ forgotten or undervalued by academia and the scientific field that surrounds it.

Marketing is a social and historical phenomenon, closely linked to social facts, organizations and individuals. Consequently, conventional epistemological postures impact on the development of the discipline itself, outlining reductionist, circumscribed and decontextualized prisms. The richness brought by the constructivist qualitative research, as well as the critical, dialectic and interpretative, is necessary, since several questions and social themes are left out of the discussions. With the influence of such approaches, new possibilities for investigation, debates in the area, and expansion of the theoretical and methodological scope are possible. The intention is not to discredit or diminish the classical approach, but to promote reflections on possible gaps that can be deepened/expanded; encourage other forms of research outside the *mainstream* – to break the current hegemony and present new perspectives on marketing.

The limitations of this work are also highlighted. First, this work selected a specific period and, therefore, some specific editions of the journal. The year 2018 was chosen due to the fact that in that year two special editions were published in the Journal, one of which deals with the state of the art of research in marketing, a topic that is of interest to the study carried out in this article. One of the works in this issue is by Hair, Harrison and Risher (2018), who point out that the analysis methods used by marketing researchers are changing due to a series of changes in management skills, technological innovations and consumer behavior. Another important point by Hair, Harrison and Risher (2018) is that advances in marketing studies have directed research in the area towards the use of increasingly quantitative methods.

Therefore, it is noted that the study did not exhaust the literature on the subject, since the cut for the investigation was limited to the period analyzed, the selected epistemological bases and the journal studied. This study, however, presents paths of analysis that can, in future works, be expanded with the addition of new articles from the same journal or from other *journals* in the area. Therefore, the discussions presented here need to be weighed with their limitations.

Finally, it is pointed out that the results achieved are not conclusive: they point to the need for further studies and thus raise suggestions for future research: other studies may expand the research carried out in this work, including other bases and epistemological approaches, a period of longer time, and the main national and international journals of Marketing and Administration.

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