



Paradigms in service research

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Abstract

Purpose – Recent discussions of the service-dominant logic (S-D logic) and the creation of a multidisciplinary service science highlight the need for a paradigmatic discussion that provides directions for ongoing service research. This article aims to examine different epistemological foundations and proposes a framework to describe and better understand the development and future of service research.

Design/methodology/approach – Using the proposed framework, an assessment of 60 selected award-winning and most cited articles is categorized using the paradigmatic framework.

Findings – Four paradigms are found to be prominent in service research: positivistic, hermeneutic, dialogic, and monologic. The positivistic option has been the dominant paradigm employed by service scholars, suggesting service scholars need to apply the three alternative paradigms more as a means to enrich and extend the service research discipline.

Research limitations/implications – There is a need to discuss the fundamental beliefs and worldviews (ontological and epistemological positions) guiding service research. Paradigms are critical determinants and drivers of good research.

Originality/value – A new framework for analyzing paradigmatic foundations in service research and directions for the future design of service research studies is proposed. The suggested framework could inspire scholars to reflect on their ontological and epistemological foundations and provide paradigmatic guidance within service research. This provides a basis for continuous expansion of the service research field.

Keywords Service research, Paradigm, Ontology, Epistemology, Methodology, Classification

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Service research has evolved over several decades (Berry and Parasuraman, 1993) in an attempt to become a research discipline in its own right. From its beginnings in the 1970s and the landmark *Journal of Marketing* article on services by Lynn Shostack (1977), this emerging discipline has gained remarkable strength, if we use the number of articles published, conferences organized, dissertations completed, and courses offered at universities and business schools as indicators. In addition, marketing and management textbooks have integrated service research approaches and findings into their contents.



Discussions of the future of service research (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004; Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005; Grönroos, 2006) call for a better understanding of the nature of service as activities and interactions.

Two emerging and similar perspectives underscore the need for a paradigmatic discussion of the future of service research. First, the service-dominant logic (S-D logic) has encouraged a focus on value co-creation through service (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008). Second, a multidisciplinary service science initiative notes the dynamics of service systems (Spohrer *et al.*, 2007; Spohrer and Maglio, 2008). Both these perspectives pose new questions and suggest new frameworks for how researchers should understand service exchange, value co-creation, and service systems. They also emphasize a dynamic approach to service research, thus indicating the need for a deeper ontological and epistemological understanding of the field.

Throughout its development, service research has focused mainly on practical issues with managerial relevance (e.g. measuring and managing service quality, generating service scripts, blueprinting the service process, designing new services, creating a service culture, developing service recovery strategies). There has been little discussion, if any, of either ontological and epistemological issues or the paradigmatic assumptions that shape the research field. Although individual scholars have offered contributions related to these issues (Hunt, 1976, 1978), their endeavors have not generated widespread discussion within the service research discipline. This lack of paradigmatic discussion is problematic because of the vast influence that paradigms have on theory development and subsequent empirical research. In addition, the lack of such a discussion appears to have hindered scholars from considering multiple paradigms and thus restricted the use of varied methods in service research.

Recently, research priorities have been suggested to guide the future of service research (Ostrom *et al.*, 2010). These priorities focus on important research topics, emphasizing practical relevance. We argue that to understand service research and provide a basis for its future development, we also need an analysis of the discipline's paradigmatic foundation. A paradigmatic foundation includes three vital elements: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Ontology refers to basic assumptions about reality, epistemology entails the nature and origin of knowledge and asks how we know what we know, and methodology is the study of the epistemological assumptions implicit in specific methods, which includes the way of looking at a phenomenon. Overview articles (Brown *et al.*, 1994) generally ignore paradigmatic discussions about the fundamental relationship between the customer and the service company, neglecting their theoretical underpinnings, basic assumptions, and fundamental theoretical points of departure, although Normann and Ramírez (1993) did make an effort to address theoretical underpinning in their examination of value networks. We contend that such underpinnings are necessary to provide a strong foundation for service research.

In this article we offer a new framework to classify, analyze, and understand the paradigms used in service research. We believe it can help guide paradigmatic and methodological analyses of service research and contribute to other paradigmatic points of departure that may widen the scientific scope of research in this field. Furthermore, by using different paradigmatic points of departure, it may be possible to develop a new understanding and frameworks to meet the challenges of service organizations. In developing the framework we first identify two dimensions that capture different

epistemological perspectives and then position service research according to four paradigms. Using this framework, we conduct an analysis of some of the most influential service research articles published in the past three decades. The final part of the article is devoted to a discussion of the theoretical implications of our proposed framework and opportunities for further research.

Emerging perspectives within service research

Much service research literature has taken a static approach – that is, companies and researchers alike tend to treat customers as passive actors (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Researchers primarily have adopted a service- or company-centric view, focusing exclusively on market offerings and service quality attributes. Furthermore, early researchers expended significant effort to identify characteristics that would distinguish services from goods, as often expressed in what has been called the “IHIP-based paradigm” or “characteristics of service”: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004). To continue its development the discipline needs a thorough discussion of paradigmatic underpinnings, but as a scientific field, service research could be enriched further with new ideas, solutions, or directions if the research community were to recognize additional epistemological and paradigmatic issues.

Some service researchers (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004, p. 34) have discussed the need for a new paradigm. We argue, however, for multiple paradigmatic approaches. Marketing and, implicitly, service research have come under extensive criticism from those outside the discipline for failing to embrace other paradigmatic approaches (Burton, 2001). In the service field, scholars also have pointed to the need for new perspectives or multidisciplinary approaches to service research (Lemmink, 2005). Therefore, we identify several different paradigmatic points of departure to help describe and better understand the development of service research. In addition, much recent discussion about the future of service research has come from long-time contributors (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004; Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005; Stauss, 2005; Bitner and Brown, 2008), who point out that the frequently referenced service characteristics and other tactics used to describe and define service are wrong, irrelevant, or incapable of capturing “the essence of service” or “value creation through service.”

Leading service scholars also call for a process-oriented, dynamic approach, rather than a transactional and static approach, to service research (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005). Although such a process-oriented, dynamic approach has not led to many theoretical frameworks or further empirical studies, articles by Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2008), Lusch and Vargo (2006), Bitner and Brown (2006) and Chesbrough and Spohrer (2006) provide a basis for thoughtful discussions. Vargo and Lusch suggest using the S-D logic to replace the entrenched goods-dominant logic in marketing and management research. A key assumption behind their logic holds that resources – both operand and operant – do not “have” value *per se* but rather that value is co-created by customers when the resources are used and combined in various ways. Value thus should be experienced and assessed in the context where it is created rather than linked to the attributes of predefined market offerings or different resources. This perspective on value creation emphasizes the dynamic nature of resources “in action,” which produce a service that creates value.

The S-D logic and service science, at their core, represent conceptualizations built on a dynamic epistemology that gets expressed through service exchange, value co-creation, and service systems. Both approaches shift the understanding of value away from a focus on service quality attributes and a description of service (i.e. not merely containing IHIP characteristics) and toward linked activities and interactions in service exchanges. Although the S-D logic and service science developments have received attention among service scholars, we perceive a need to address in more depth the ontological, epistemological, and methodological issues of service research, as well as how paradigms, theories, and methods may offer a fruitful platform for service research.

Paradigmatic classification

Service research has been influenced by several disciplines (e.g. marketing, operations, sociology, psychology), and an examination of its epistemological and paradigmatic roots reflects this influence. For example, similar to marketing, service research has its dominant roots in a positivistic paradigm. A paradigm in this context refers to the entire constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by the members of a given community (Kuhn, 1970). Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that when conducting research, the choice of method should be secondary to the choice of a research paradigm, because the latter should influence methodological choices. In a similar vein, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000, p. 4) indicate “it is not methods but ontology and epistemology that are determinants of good social science.” Because paradigms have significant value in both practical and empirical research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), it is vital to understand their influence on both the research design and its outcomes.

Ontology, epistemology, and methodology

Ontology relates to questions such as whether an objective reality exists; it can be defined as the science of being (Burrell and Morgan, 1985). Ontology also reflects the claims that a particular approach to social inquiry makes about the nature of social reality (i.e. nature of service research). It investigates the type of reality that exists, what that reality looks like, which entities exist within the reality, and how these entities interact. The service researcher’s view of reality establishes the cornerstone for all other assumptions; these assumptions predicate other assumptions, and therefore, the researcher’s view of ontology effects his or her epistemological persuasion and influences the methodological approach chosen.

Epistemology addresses how we perceive the world and raises questions about both how we understand it and how we communicate this knowledge to others (Burrell and Morgan, 1985). The means to obtain knowledge about the world may vary with the social context and different phenomena; consequently, no single epistemology is right or wrong. Applied to service research, different epistemological approaches can be used to describe how to view the world and explain the activities and interactions that form the basis for the research processes.

In the context of a paradigmatic discussion, methodology has to do with the relationship between theory and method, not the method *per se*. Methodology is how scholars acquire knowledge; in the case of service research, methodology involves how scholars acquire knowledge about the nature of service. For example, to obtain knowledge about service quality, service scholars have used different snapshot methods (e.g. surveys) to identify important service quality attributes (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988;

Furrer *et al.*, 2000). On the other hand, if we view service as processes, scholars have used methods that follow the actors over time (e.g. observations, video-based methods, and diary writing) to map activities and interactions constituting the service process (Echeverri, 2005; Bowen, 2008).

The importance of understanding different perspectives in service research

Ontology provides researchers with a lens to formulate their research questions and helps guide their selection and use of theories and research methods. Because our ontological perspective is the lens through which we view the nature of scholarly knowledge, it is vital to explore, assess, and ultimately develop the discipline's assumptions about the nature of service. The identified generic quality factors formed the basis for a service quality instrument, SERVQUAL, that measured the gap between expected service and perceived service (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985, 1988; Grönroos, 1984). Collectively, research in this stream has provided a set of normative and static service quality factors that indicated for scholars and managers what was important for customers. Yet a broader understanding of service quality research has emerged from other paradigmatic positions, including one that focuses on the process dimension of service quality (Grönroos, 1984; Brady and Cronin, 2001; Schneider and White, 2004) and another that focuses on the emotional dimensions of service quality (Cronin, 2003).

Paradigmatic dimensions

Epistemology, as noted, includes two basic dimensions:

- (1) how we know the world; and
- (2) the relationship between the researcher and the research topic.

Therefore, we suggest using these two dimensions to capture the epistemological diversity in service research. First, we can view the world in a dynamic, process-oriented relationship manner or with a static snapshot of the relationship. Thus, our first epistemological dimension entails the nature of relationships. Second, we note the origin of concepts and problems. To approach the relationship between the researcher and the research problem, we might describe the source or origin of the research concepts and problem definitions to design the research process. This dimension captures the extent to which the research design develops in cooperation with the participants in the study. Using these two epistemological dimensions, we propose a four-cell matrix for classifying various service research paradigms.

The nature of relationships dimension

The nature of relationships dimension describes how the researcher views the form of relationship between actors (i.e. customers and service companies). Depending on the view, a study can be either dynamic or static, such that its design emphasizes a process orientation that describes behavior patterns over time or a static-oriented model of a relationship. We suggest this dimension constitutes a set of divergent notions at two ends of a continuum, dynamic and static, which underpin a process versus a stationary orientation. For example, Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) effectively represent the static end of the continuum, with their focus on service quality and four key service gaps that are likely to alter customers' perceptions of service. Research on customer value (Lapierre, 2000; Ulaga, 2003; Ulaga and Eggert, 2006) offers examples of studies at the dynamic

end of the continuum; they focus on the drivers of value creation for the customer over time and allow different actors (e.g. employees, customers) to adapt to changes in the service provision.

In Table I, we present an overview of the differences between dynamic and static research. Service research at the dynamic end of the continuum captures co-creation, involvement, activities, deeds, and interactions between actors. A dynamic approach to service research focuses on the complexity, time, and actors involved in co-creation of value. Time is essential to capture the dynamic behavioral patterns of the actors, so the researcher views service phenomena from a dynamic perspective, as an active value-creating relationship. In other words, these studies attempt to capture the dynamics of value creation during service provision. The right column in Table I depicts the static end of the continuum, or service research that focuses on the present as a stationary situation. The static approach to service research is interested in structure; that is, its key focus is to explain the structures (e.g. determinants, consequences) and the time line is essential in establishing the causal sequence of the events while the dynamic nature of time is of lesser importance. Studies at this end of the continuum instead give the researcher a snapshot of the service process. Research with a static approach provides standardized, system-based knowledge, whereas a dynamic approach captures complexity and greater knowledge exchange, grounded in the dialogue in which actors participate.

The origin of concepts and problems dimension

Answering where and how research concepts arise is fundamental to research. Inspired by Deetz (1996), we include the origin of concepts and problems as a second epistemological dimension of service research. This dimension provides a fruitful basis for addressing methodological issues associated with the relationship between the researcher and the research problem. One end of this continuum captures a research design developed in cooperation with service participants (i.e. they are part of the research process); the other end describes participants brought into the research “interaction” by the researcher whose position remains constant throughout the research process. In other words, research objectives may be either developed with or applied to the service participants being studied. We label the two ends of this continuum for the origin of concepts and problems emergent and a priori. The emergent end is most often characterized by a research design that focuses on qualitative research and features

	Dynamic approach to service research	Static approach to service research
Basic epistemological position	Actors viewed as active partners and co-creator participants in a value-creating relationship	Actors are viewed as passive receivers in the transaction
Description	High exchange of knowledge Dialogue with actors Complex Time is essential	Low exchange of knowledge Standardized System based Time is not essential
Dominant research methods	Dynamic and time capture methods	Snapshot methods
Examples of articles from service research	Benitez <i>et al.</i> (2007), Boulding <i>et al.</i> (1993)	Huy (2002), Meuter <i>et al.</i> (2000)

Table I.
Nature of relationships

a dialogue between the researcher and informants. Common research designs include focus groups (Tuli *et al.*, 2007) and case studies (Sharma and Mehta, 2004). In contrast, the a priori end of the continuum generally features quantitative research designs (Rust *et al.*, 2004), although conceptual articles (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) may also belong to this quadrant because they are usually developed at a distance from any research participants. Service research falls at this end of the continuum when distance separates the researcher and participants.

We illustrate, in Table II, the origin of concepts and problems dimension, for which the choice and stability of the language system (i.e. text or figures) is important because the conceptual system determines the statement of problems. The emergent end of the continuum describes research that aims to obtain phenomenological insights with an open language structure using text, not figures or predefined categories (Table II). In emergent research, the theoretical concepts, if used, are considered only guides to getting started. Such research is driven by narratives, and depending on the story, is constantly open to change and new meanings. These meanings can be translated and redefined through interactions during the research process, and a sense of meaning becomes the central concern. This approach provides research results based on insight rather than a calculated “truth”. A researcher with an emergent view of service research studies the world as an open system because he or she wants to obtain phenomenological insights, driven by participants’ expectations and experiences, and therefore, the research objectives are not predefined but instead proceed from the participants involved. The epistemological view at the emergent end of the continuum looks on the world as a set of complex processes in which many entities (i.e. people) interact.

The a priori end of the continuum refers to research for which the concepts used by the researcher remain constant throughout the research process. At this end of the continuum, research is heavily theory driven and emphasizes definitions delineated prior to the research process. Collected data get coded using the researcher’s language and then added to existing knowledge of the topic. A researcher with an a priori view of service research considers the world a given, fixed structure and uses a categorical research language (e.g. predefined categories and figures) to allow for statistical testing

	Emergent approach to service research	A priori approach to service research
Basic epistemological position	To obtain phenomenological insight, revelation, and open language system	To obtain a fixed language system and construct a positivist science
Description	A theoretically driven Local narrative	Theoretically driven Grand narrative of progress and emancipation
	Situational practical knowledge Changeability and meaning as central concerns Proceeds from the other	Generalizable theoretical knowledge Rationality and truth as central concerns Proceeds from the self
Dominant research methods	Exploration of pure subjectivity	Lab experiments, surveys
Origin of concepts and problems	Bitner <i>et al.</i> (1994) Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Lusch <i>et al.</i> (2007) Rust and Chung (2006)

Table II.
Origin of concepts and problems

and calculations. A priori research also focuses on the empirical analysis of defined relationships and specifies the precise nature of laws and regularities in a manner much like the natural sciences. The research objectives are predefined and proceed from the researcher. In summary, research that takes an emergent approach provides a theoretically driven contributions and situational new knowledge focused on meaning; an a priori approach instead results in generalizable, theoretically driven understanding and contributions to existing knowledge.

Four categories of paradigms

To understand the different paradigms in service research, we introduce a classification matrix formed by the two dimensions, the nature of relationships and the origin of concepts and problems (Figure 1). The four quadrants establish a paradigmatic platform that can guide scholars in their research design. We examine each quadrant – positivistic, hermeneutic, monologic, and dialogic – and discuss their application to service research next.

To demonstrate how paradigmatic dimensions relate to existing service research, we have assessed a selection of leading service articles to assign them to the quadrants. In particular, we examine two sets of academic articles, award-winning service articles and some of the most frequently cited articles within service research.

The award-winning articles included in our classification have been selected by a committee of respected international scholars affiliated with the American Marketing Association’s service special interest group (SERVSIG). The group has selected one article annually, published in the preceding year, since 1994; we thus include 16 articles from 1993 to 2008. The second set features a selection of some of the most frequently cited articles from peer-reviewed, scholarly journals publishing within service research. The selected articles reference “service” in the title, abstract, or list of keywords. To embrace the entire field of service research, the search was not limited to a specific set of journals. Instead, we combined the following search keywords with “service”: information technology, management, marketing, operations, and quality. This approach generated articles from many disciplines, including business, management, marketing, operations, service, psychology, social sciences, and computer science

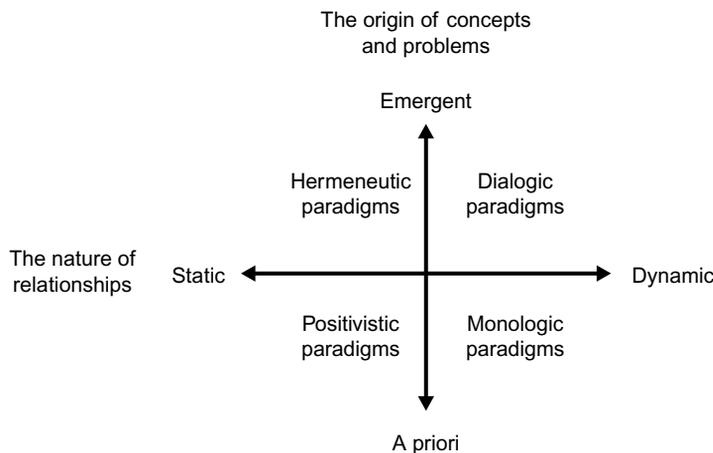


Figure 1.
Classifying studies based on paradigmatic dimensions

representing the time period between 1977 and 2008. This period was divided into five-year time periods where the number of articles selected from one time period is relative to the number of articles published in this period and the total number of articles published in the overall time period. This approach was used to provide an equal opportunity for the representation of “younger” articles.

To be included in the final sample, articles had to meet three criteria:

- (1) they were studies conducted in a service-related context;
- (2) focused mainly on service issues rather than just referring to service; and
- (3) achieved the highest average yearly citation rate within the period.

A computerized search using the ISI Web of Science resulted in 13,765 articles that met our criteria. From this collection, we selected 44 articles.

Based on these criteria our sample includes 60 scholarly articles published worldwide. We find that a majority of these articles are written by researchers affiliated with North American universities. However, our intent is not to create a definitive list of the “best” or “most cited” service research but to identify studies representative of service research in the past 30 years. Indeed, it could be argued that our selection criteria has resulted in a choice of less innovative, less emergent, and less dynamic articles. We do not claim to have captured a statistically valid sample but rather have included a somewhat arbitrary list of prominent service research articles over this period to illustrate our four paradigms.

We have classified the articles based on the nature of relationships and origin of concepts and problems dimensions, relying primarily on their purpose and contribution to determine the nature of relationships dimension and their research design and measurement/analysis (i.e. methodology) to determine the origin of concepts and problems dimension. The articles are listed, depending on their paradigmatic home, in Tables III-VI.

The positivistic paradigm

Service research is positivistic if it uses formal propositions, quantifiable measures of variables, hypotheses testing, and inferences about a phenomenon drawn from a representative sample of the stated population. Researchers within this paradigm might be methodological determinists, functionalists, or simply practitioners of the variable analytic tradition (Deetz, 1996). Positivistic studies tend to be driven by theory and assume that reality is objectively given and can offer guidelines for how companies, employees, and customers should act. The measurable constructs are independent of the researcher and his or her instruments. The positivistic paradigm also emphasizes the centrality of codification or a search for regularity and normalization of experience (Hollway, 1984; Deetz, 1996). Gergen (1992) calls this paradigm “modern,” and emphasizes that knowledge is positive, cumulative, and progressive. That is, the positivistic paradigm focuses on the codification of data about the phenomena studied and a presentation of an underlying, generalizable pattern.

In positivistic studies, the phenomenon consists of predefined (a priori) relationships. Orlikowski *et al.* (1991, p. 5) state that “such studies serve primarily to test theory in an attempt to increase predictive understanding of phenomena.” This attempt is especially important for an applied scientific discipline, such as service research, where relevance and rigor are key criteria for the acceptance of positivistic conclusions.

Authors	Title
Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> (1996) ^a	The behavioral consequences of service quality
Anderson <i>et al.</i> (1997) ^a	Customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitability: differences between goods and services
Tax <i>et al.</i> (1998) ^a	Customer evaluations of service complaint experiences: implications for relationship marketing
Hartline <i>et al.</i> (2000) ^a	Corridors of influence in the dissemination of customer-oriented strategy to customer contact service employees
Berry <i>et al.</i> (2002) ^a	Understanding service convenience
Lovelock and Gummesson (2004) ^a	Whither services marketing? In search of a new paradigm and fresh perspectives
Harris and Ogbonna (2006) ^a	Service sabotage: a study of antecedents and consequences
Shostack (1977) ^b	Breaking free from product marketing
Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> (1988) ^b	SERVQUAL: a multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality
Cronin and Taylor (1992) ^b	Measuring service quality – a reexamination and extension
Anderson and Sullivan (1993) ^b	The antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction for firms
Anderson <i>et al.</i> (1994) ^b	Customer satisfaction, market share, and profitability – findings from Sweden
Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> (1996) ^b	The behavioral consequences of service quality
Garbarino and Johnson (1999) ^b	The different roles of satisfaction, trust, and commitment in customer relationships
Kirkman and Rosen (1999) ^b	Beyond self-management: antecedents and consequences of team empowerment
Bharadwaj (2000) ^b	A resource-based perspective on information technology capability and firm performance: an empirical investigation
Lynch and Arieli (2000) ^b	Wine online: search costs affect competition on price, quality, and distribution
Cronin <i>et al.</i> (2000) ^b	Assessing the effects of quality, value, and customer satisfaction on consumer behavioral intentions in service environments
Hitt <i>et al.</i> (2001) ^b	Direct and moderating effects of human capital on strategy and performance in professional service firms: a resource-based perspective
Bhattacharjee (2001) ^b	Understanding information systems continuance: an expectation-confirmation model
Sirdeshmukh <i>et al.</i> (2002) ^b	Consumer trust, value, and loyalty in relational exchanges
Mckinney <i>et al.</i> (2002) ^b	The measurement of web-customer satisfaction: an expectation and disconfirmation approach
Ho (2002) ^b	Reinventing local governments and the E-Government initiative
Devaraj <i>et al.</i> (2002) ^b	Antecedents of B2C channel satisfaction and preference: validating E-Commerce metrics
Poppo and Zenger (2002) ^b	Do formal contracts and relational governance function as substitutes or complements?
Chatterjee <i>et al.</i> (2002) ^b	Shaping up for E-commerce: institutional enablers of the organizational assimilation of web technologies
Batt (2002) ^b	Managing customer services: human resource practices, quit rates, and sales growth

(continued)

Table III.
Leading service research
belonging to the
positivistic paradigmatic
quadrant

Authors	Title
DeLone and McLean (2003) ^b	The DeLone and Mclean model of information systems success: a ten-year update
Burnham <i>et al.</i> (2003) ^b	Consumer switching costs: a typology, antecedents, and consequences
Rust <i>et al.</i> (2004) ^b	Return on marketing: using customer equity to focus marketing strategy
Ray <i>et al.</i> (2004) ^b	Capabilities, business processes, and competitive advantage: choosing the dependent variable in empirical tests of the resource-based view
Pavlou and Gefen (2004) ^b	Building effective online marketplaces with institution-based trust
Rust and Chung (2006) ^b	Marketing models of service and relationships
Gupta and Zeithaml (2006) ^b	Competing paradigms in qualitative research

Notes: ^aSERVSIG award-winning articles; ^bmost frequently cited articles; these articles do not constitute a definitive list of the “best” or “most cited” service research but are representative of service research in the past 30 years; the number of articles selected from a given time period depends on the relative number of articles published in this period in relation to the total number of service research articles published from 1977 to 2008

Table III.

Authors	Title
Bharadwaj <i>et al.</i> (1993) ^a	Sustainable competitive advantage in service industries: a conceptual model and research
Hogan <i>et al.</i> (2003) ^a	What is the true value of a lost customer?
Matta and Folkes (2005) ^a	Inferences about the brand from counterstereotypical service providers
Wangenheim and Bayon (2007) ^a	Behavioral consequences of overbooking service capacity
Fang <i>et al.</i> (2008) ^a	Effect of service transition strategies on firm value
Keller (1993) ^b	Conceptualizing, measuring, managing customer-based brand equity
Boulding <i>et al.</i> (1993) ^b	A dynamic process model of service quality: from expectations to behavioral intentions
Peterson <i>et al.</i> (1997) ^b	Exploring the implications of the internet for consumer marketing
Leonard and Sensiper (1998) ^b	The role of tacit knowledge in group innovation
Bolton (1998) ^b	A dynamic model of the duration of the customer’s relationship with a continuous service provider: the role of satisfaction
Oliver (1999) ^b	Whence consumer loyalty?
Vargo and Lusch (2004) ^b	Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing
Hitt <i>et al.</i> (2006) ^b	The importance of resources in the internationalization of professional service firms: the good, the bad, and the ugly
Lusch <i>et al.</i> (2007) ^b	Competing through service: insights from service-dominant logic
Benítez <i>et al.</i> (2007) ^b	Using fuzzy number for measuring quality of service in the hotel industry
Kleijnen <i>et al.</i> (2007) ^b	An assessment of value creation in mobile service delivery and the moderating role of time consciousness
Vargo and Lusch (2008) ^b	Service-dominant logic: continuing the evolution

Notes: ^aSERVSIG award-winning articles; ^bmost frequently cited articles

Table IV.
Leading service research belonging to the monologic paradigmatic quadrant

The positivistic paradigm also combines static and a priori approaches, such that a researcher concentrates on understanding a stationary situation with a single transaction as the focus and time is not a relevant issue. In this sense, the researcher maintains a distance from the research object and emphasizes a theoretical perspective, such that the research purpose emanates from this researcher. The positivistic paradigm is well illustrated by Zeithaml *et al.* (1996) study of the behavioral consequences of service quality: they offer a model describing the impact of service quality on specific behaviors that signal whether customers will remain with or defect from a company. The situation they describe captures a snapshot of customer behavior, which provides a description of how companies should act to increase customer retention. The theory-driven research within the positivistic paradigm often requires a test of a model using questionnaires constructed without input from the respondents. Service research articles from our sample that we would classify in this quadrant are listed in Table III.

Each paradigm frames a specific market phenomenon (e.g. service quality, customer complaint behavior, or new service development) in an explicit way and when doing so, uses a particular set of methods. In this way the challenges with a specific paradigm, and thus influence the perceived knowledge-gaps and the design of future research, is often related to the researcher’s mental picture of the studied phenomenon and the limitation of methods used. These limitations can be both of a technical nature – that is, the methods are not adequately developed – or of a more practical character – that is, limited by the researcher’s knowledge or his or her access to time and money.

In the positivistic paradigm, service research most often portrays a specific and quite delimited phenomenon that captures the static patterns or picture of a specific market or service phenomena. Our analysis suggests that the positivistic paradigm is

Authors	Title
Ofir and Simonson (2001) ^a	In search of negative customer feedback: the effect of expecting to evaluate on satisfaction evaluations
Suchman (1995) ^b	Managing legitimacy – strategic and institutional approaches
Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> (2002) ^b	Service quality delivery through web sites: a critical review of extant knowledge
Tucker and Edmondson (2003) ^b	Why hospitals do not Learn from failures: organizational and psychological dynamics that inhibit system change

Notes: ^aSERVSIG award-winning articles; ^bmost frequently cited articles

Table V.
Leading service research belonging to the dialogic paradigmatic quadrant

Authors	Title
Bitner <i>et al.</i> (1994) ^a	Critical service encounters: the employee’s viewpoint
Keaveney (1995) ^a	Customer switching behavior in service industries: an exploratory study
Price and Arnould (1999) ^a	Commercial friendships: service provider – client relationships in context
Huy (2002) ^b	Emotional balancing of organizational continuity and radical change: the contribution of middle managers

Notes: ^aSERVSIG award-winning articles; ^bmost frequently cited articles

Table VI.
Leading service research belonging to the hermeneutic paradigmatic quadrant

the most frequently used paradigm within service research. The reason might be the tradition from the nature of science and the fact that managers have demanded rapid and normative information for their market decisions. The positivistic paradigm is characterized by methods that capture the static situation – such as surveys (Chebat *et al.*, 2005; Colton *et al.*, 2010) or experiments (Bitner, 1990; Huertas-García and Consolación-Segura, 2009). The challenge for future research within this paradigm is to refine these methods to become even more detailed and capture more complex structures of the studied phenomenon.

The monologic paradigm

Monologism is a metaphysical view that regards everything as part of one essential essence or principle (James, 1912). It also provides an independent and unique source of meaning created by the researcher him- or herself. In other words, the statements of others (e.g. those being studied, other researchers) get framed by the voice of the researcher, which creates a singular context. In monologism, the researcher assumes the role of an isolated entity – that is, a Cartesian cognizing subject who is a self-disciplined monad or isolated researcher (Sampson, 1993). In so doing the researcher assumes a variety of roles: knower, apprentice, and learner. Knowing is internal and subjective. Throughout the research process, the researcher also may act and react continuously in response to participants. In summary, service research appears in the monologic quadrant if “the researchers “prescript” both the questions asked and the answers accepted, as well as the order in which they ask the questions” (Nystrand, 1997, p. 12).

The monologic paradigm combines dynamic and a priori approaches, because the researcher focuses on contributing to an understanding of processes and captures a temporal dimension during the service provision, as well as the dynamics of the relationship. The researcher then can study changing patterns in the informants’ behaviors and the surrounding context. A researcher using this paradigm is in a good position to examine complex, people-based concepts that must be studied within a certain time period. The monologic paradigm, as with the positivistic paradigm, assumes an objectively created reality, with the research instrument independent of the participants. That is, the outcomes of this theory-driven research should contribute to generalized theoretical knowledge. The research objective also reflects the researcher and echoes only the researcher’s voice. The difference between the positivistic and monologic paradigms, though, is that the latter pays close attention to time in dynamic service processes, whereas the former adopts a static approach and captures a snapshot of a stationary service process.

The monologic paradigm appears particularly in Bolton’s (1998) study of the link between customer satisfaction and retention. Bolton develops a dynamic quantitative model that shows that customers who have higher prior cumulative customer satisfaction scores engage in longer relationships with the organization. Her study captures dynamics in customer processes between two points in time; then on the basis of existing knowledge of the research community, Bolton develops and tests the proposed model in an empirical study. The aim is to identify generalizable, underlying patterns of customer satisfaction and retention and thereby provide a rationale that uses a predefined language system (survey questionnaire) to confirm extant theory. Other service research articles from our sample that we classify as being in this quadrant are listed in Table IV.

The dynamic nature of the monologic paradigm is well in line with the definitions of service, emphasizing the dynamic, process-oriented framework represented lately by S-D logic and service science. A number of researchers emphasize and use this paradigm; however their time and knowledge of methods capturing the dynamic elements are somewhat restricted. This means that we have to encourage service researchers to focus on learning and applying methods suitable for this paradigm. To defeat some of the obstacles when adopting and using this paradigm, researchers should emphasize longitudinal and dynamic research designs, using several methodological options, such as an analytical time function based on the theory of kinematic waves (Perakis and Roels, 2006), replication hosting system development (Sivasubramanian *et al.*, 2004), or deterministic, nonlinear, dynamic factor graphs for time series modeling (Mirowski and Lecun, 2009). In addition, dynamic simulation and the use of 3D technology could help researchers acquire further knowledge about service processes.

The dialogic paradigm

Service research employs a dialogic paradigm if its main task is to capture the dynamic and complex essence of the field, together with the object of study. Because “In dialogue, participants speak as unique individuals about their own beliefs and experiences, reveal their uncertainties as well as certainties, and try to understand one another” (Becker *et al.*, 2003, p. 184), all participants (e.g. researcher and research subjects) are encouraged to question the dominant paradigm, explore options for problem definition and resolution, and discover inadequacies in existing theories and concepts. Research based on the dialogic paradigm emphasizes an understanding of processes and relationships over time.

Dialogism also is based on the relativistic ontological assumption that realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The dialogic framework contains an epistemological belief that the inquirer and the object of inquiry are interactively linked, influence each other, and eventually become inseparable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, 2000). The researcher and participants engage in dialogue among themselves to develop “more informed and sophisticated reconstructions” (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p. 170). Because “understanding is always interpretation and hence, interpretation is an explicit form of understanding” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 307), varying constructions may be compared, contrasted, and eventually understood through dialogical relationships. One aim of dialogue is to move from a partial to a complete understanding of the phenomena.

Dialogic principles are deeply rooted in the social reality of consciousness, reflection, and interaction and closely linked to human activities. The dialogical paradigm studies dynamic and complex interactions and pays attention to time as it relates to activities and interaction in service processes. In this context, the process of dialogue extends to include several research participants (e.g. one or several researchers, one or several informants) in an ongoing, open exchange. What one participant says or does directly influences and is influenced by interactions with other participants. This influence has been key in service research – particularly during “moments of truth,” when customers and service providers interact and influence each other in dialectic ways. Dialogism assumes knowledge is something individuals create together rather than alone; that is, “knowing is made and remade, reified and maintained, challenged and destroyed in communication: in dialogue, contest, and negotiation” (Dervin, 1994, p. 377).

The dialogic paradigm in turn combines the dynamic and emergent approaches. The researcher focuses on understanding the actor's role in the service interaction, particularly when examining value co-creation. Researchers employing the dialogic paradigm attempt to capture the diversity and complexity of the phenomena within the study during a certain time frame. The study is conducted in concert with the research object, and reality is a projection of human integration. The research design thus embraces methods with an open language (e.g. narratives) and is not mainly theoretically driven.

Ofir and Simonson's (2001) study of customers' evaluations of quality and satisfaction effectively illustrates the dialogic perspective. They demonstrate that customers often expect to be asked to evaluate a firm's offerings and that such expectations lead to less favorable quality and satisfaction evaluations and reduced willingness to purchase and recommend the evaluated service. Ofir and Simonson view this topic from a dynamic perspective, in which customers actively engage in evaluation of the relationship. In other words, their study focuses on processes and tries to capture the dynamics of the customer's service evaluation over time. To understand the phenomenon, the authors conduct a series of studies (field and laboratory) to examine the predictions and psychological processes implied by different concepts. Some basic theoretical terms enter the research process, and the research questions get translated and redefined on the basis of interactions during the process. These authors obtain phenomenological insights, driven by participants' expectations and experiences. Other service research articles from our sample that we classify in this quadrant are listed in Table V.

The dialogical paradigm is the most distanced paradigm from the positivistic paradigm, both in the sense of dynamics and in the relationship of the research participants. To embrace service as a dynamic phenomenon, research must encompass behavioral patterns of activities, interactions, experiences, processes, and relationships. In addition, it needs new methods that can capture mechanisms in service processes and time-related issues in more depth and enable us to test dynamic phenomena empirically. The paucity of methods that capture dynamic processes over time is a major barrier to the continued development of service research within this paradigm.

The hermeneutic paradigm

The hermeneutic paradigm has its philosophical base in phenomenology (Boland, 1985). In contrast with the positivistic paradigm, service research is hermeneutic if it assumes knowledge of reality can be gained only through social constructions and an open language system that features words and shared meanings. Scholars who employ the hermeneutic paradigm view the service research field as a social place, in which the best way to understand reality is to experience the world as a social construction that can be articulated as a result of human sense-making activities (Walsham, 1993). The emphasis of the paradigm is a social rather than an economic or exchange view of service interactions. That is, the hermeneutic paradigm seeks to capture all (or at least many) socially constructed features that influence the study phenomena. A study with such aims cannot use only an economic (rational) view, because doing so would limit the possibility of obtaining a "full" understanding of the social context. Hermeneutic research also does not predefine dependent and independent variables but instead focuses on the complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges (Kaplan and

Maxwell, 1994). In the hermeneutic paradigm, the center of attention is an understanding of meaning related to the focal phenomenon (Schwandt, 1994) at a given point in time. Thus, it differs from the positivistic paradigm, for which the researcher aims at generalization and observations from a distance.

The hermeneutic paradigm combines static and emergent approaches. Recall that the basic epistemological position of the origin of concepts and problems dimension is to obtain phenomenological insights using an open language system. In this paradigm, the researcher focuses on understanding complexity and diversity in the system at a certain point in time, as illustrated by Keaveney's (1995) research on customer switching behavior in service industries. Her research, which is not theoretically driven, considers the causes of customer switching behavior and gives a static description of the service switching process by identifying its drivers. Switching behavior is not a process but rather a situational description of the causes for customers to switch service providers. Keaveney's research also aims to obtain phenomenological insights through exploratory interviews that prioritize interactions with research informants (open language). Other service research articles from our sample that belong in this quadrant are listed in Table VI.

The hermeneutic paradigm is, like the dialogic paradigm, a theory-generating paradigm where the purpose is to understand the relationships within and between service and market phenomena, although the hermeneutic paradigm focuses on the stationary structures of the relationship. Most often, the researcher views the service and market phenomena as a social construction that needs to be revealed, portrayed, and understood. To capture these complex patterns, often extensive amount of data from individual actors needs to be collected, sorted, and interpreted. To overcome this challenge advanced computerized software programs with the capacity to analyze various data such as observations, extensive interviews, video-based data and narratives have to be further developed. The hermeneutic paradigm implies that the design of the studies captures individual and subjective views on the market phenomena. This paradigm requires the researcher to be sensitive to the participants' perceptions of the phenomena studied.

Discussion

Every scientific research discipline needs to discuss and debate its epistemological and paradigmatic underpinnings, as well as topics and empirical phenomena in need of more research. This article suggests a framework for identifying, portraying, and analyzing different paradigms within service research. We have proposed two dimensions (nature of relationships and origin of concepts and problems) to describe the different paradigmatic perspectives within service research, and we classified 60 award-winning or widely cited service research articles into the four resultant paradigms (positivistic, monologic, dialogic, and hermeneutic). Among the 60 articles in our chosen set, we find 52 *a priori* studies and only 8 emergent ones; we also classify 21 as dynamic and 39 as static. Combining these two dimensions, we find that 35 of the articles are positivistic, 17 are monologic, 4 are hermeneutic, and 4 are dialogic. Although we cannot claim our sample of articles accurately reflects all published service research, the results of our analysis would seem to suggest that a large percentage of service articles focus on transactions rather than processes and relationships, have a static rather than dynamic (process-oriented) approach, and are dominated by the positivistic paradigm.

In our opinion, this preoccupation with the positivistic paradigm has limited the development of service research. A restricted epistemological perspective – that is, using primarily a single paradigmatic position – reduces the potential of service research to develop as a discipline. We need to expand service research beyond the positivistic paradigm to better understand service exchange, value co-creation, and service systems. By taking more than one paradigmatic position or comparing results from studies using different paradigms, scholars can enrich the service research discipline. To do this, it is vital to understand the paradigmatic elements of ontology, epistemology, and methodology. However, the service research community might gain more knowledge by using different epistemological views to study various phenomena. A dynamic relationship tends to be more complex and diverse than a single, static transaction, so studying an issue often demands different epistemological approaches to understand the related phenomena fully. By continuing to follow a narrow paradigmatic path in the long run, the discipline may risk becoming marginalized, because service phenomena by nature are complex, interactive, and relational. Service research instead could prosper by taking various paradigmatic points of departure that could lead to the development of new approaches to both theoretical and managerial issues.

Relatively few articles, especially empirical ones, have focused on the dynamic aspects of service, which seems surprising. From early on, service has been described using activities and interactions as common terms; more recently, both the S-D logic and service science approaches have stressed a dynamic view of value co-creation and service systems. One way to accomplish such development is to examine service research publications from different paradigmatic perspectives; describing and analyzing the service research field from only one paradigmatic perspective limits understanding within the field and hampers the possibility of gaining new insights. One illustrative example of this limitation refers to the long-standing conceptualization and measure of service quality solely using the confirmation/disconfirmation construct (Oliver, 1997).

From the beginning of “modern” service research the discipline has been interdisciplinary combining marketing, operations and human resources, and it has been multimethodological and global including the use of both analysis of survey data and case analysis. To continue to grow and remain sustainable as an academic discipline, it is important for both the service research community and service industries to use various paradigmatic points of departure to study service and market phenomena. Thus, we may acquire new knowledge and gain new insight into managerial challenges across different industries. In the past decade, some service research has considered dynamic phenomena. The emergences of the S-D logic and service science have renewed the interest in further research attention to the dynamics of service. We regard this development as positive, because it balances the positivistic and hermeneutic paradigms and seems to capture how leading scholars define service. Service is considered to consist of processes, deeds, and performances (Grönroos, 1984; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2009) created in dynamic interactions. Although some scholars have embraced this perspective (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Hitt *et al.*, 2006), the same receptivity is not evident in some of the most frequently cited scholarly service research articles from the past 30 years. To create a diversified, prosperous service research discipline, the research community should pursue different paradigms, encouraged by opportunities such as research conferences and journals that call for multifaceted, paradigmatic discussions.

Which pragmatic actions can the relatively new discipline of service research initiate to heighten the awareness of and encourage the use of such multiple paradigms? Ostrom *et al.* (2010) provide a global agenda for service research in the years ahead. We maintain that the wealth of insights that could be gained from pursuing this agenda would be even richer if researchers investigated service phenomena using multiple paradigms. The global research agenda is created by collecting information from a few executives and scholars that have put forward a number of specific managerial service and market phenomena (e.g. service infusion, service innovation, service design) that needs to be studied in the future. However, Ostrom *et al.* (2010) do not discuss paradigmatic issues related to design and how to carry out the suggested global research agenda. This article and its paradigmatic framework can be viewed as a complement to their discussion and hence these two articles can be seen in context when future research will be discussed (what topics should be studied and how they should be researched). We therefore advocate a multi-paradigmatic approach be used by the discipline when studying the different themes prioritized in the research agenda.

To make this happen, the gatekeepers of service research must embrace and become advocates of underutilized paradigms. By gatekeepers, we refer to journal editors, conference chairs, and senior scholars of the discipline. Through editorials, calls for papers, sessions at conferences, and informal networks, these leaders can encourage others to be open to alternative paradigms. Furthermore, we encourage academics to introduce ontological issues in master and PhD programs. Service research has a long history of openness to multiple disciplines but no significant history of embracing multiple paradigms. Instead, the discipline's preoccupation primarily with one paradigm seemingly has limited service research in areas like business-to-business service and "home grown" theory (Rust, 2006).

Beyond encouraging the appreciation of new paradigms, gatekeepers can enrich the discipline by advocating paradigmatic triangulation. In research, triangulation helps address the limitations of a given methodology by complementing its weaknesses with the strength of other methods (Brewer and Hunter, 1989). The use of multiple paradigms in a research field similarly can help researchers view a problem from multiple perspectives.

Final thoughts

We contend that paradigms are critical determinants and drivers of good research. Through our modest assessment of existing research, we suggest that the service research community should pursue additional paradigms, beyond the dominant positivistic option. To facilitate such endeavors, our investigation and framework could provide a basis for discussing service research directions and the need for different approaches. Because paradigms influence the theory used and methods applied, they shape our understanding of the world and the phenomena studied. We would obtain several benefits if future service research acknowledged how different paradigms influence understanding of a phenomenon, especially compared with an approach that relies on a single paradigm.

A better and more thorough understanding of paradigmatic and methodological developments in service research also could be achieved by studying the review process in leading scholarly service journals over time. A comparison with the development of other areas in marketing and/or management, such as strategic change, globalization, or

organizational culture, also might offer a clearer understanding of the role of paradigms and paradigmatic issues in the development of the service discipline. We perceive a real need to study in depth the dynamic aspect of service research in particular (i.e. monologic and dialogic paradigms).

Although service research scholars have gained substantial knowledge in the past 40 years, much remains to be learned. Service research has evolved successfully and is becoming a discipline of its own, but throughout its development, this research has focused mainly on practical issues with managerial relevance. We find few, if any, ontological and epistemological discussions or commentary about the paradigmatic assumptions of the research field. We hope our discussion of the various paradigms used in service research inspires scholars to consider the epistemological foundations of their research carefully and continue to expand the boundaries of knowledge in our field.

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