Theoretical And Conceptual Review: An Essential Part of Social and Management Sciences Research Process

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Abstract

This study employed a comprehensive literature review to identify existing articles that address theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Articles were sourced from reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, Academia.edu, ResearchGate, among others. This approach involves summarizing and synthesizing existing literature in a narrative format. The study provides a descriptive overview of key concepts, findings, and debates within the field. The research paper provides a broad overview of a topic or to explore emerging trends and debates. The implications of not using conceptual reviews and theoretical reviews in social sciences and management sciences research extend beyond individual research studies to impact the credibility, relevance, and ethical integrity of research findings, as well as the advancement of knowledge and professional development within the field. By prioritizing conceptual and theoretical grounding in their research processes, researchers can enhance the quality, impact, and relevance of their work, contributing to a deeper understanding of social and organizational phenomena and informing evidence-based decision-making and practice.

Keywords: *Conceptual Research, Literature Review, Research Process, Theoretical Research, Social Sciences, Management Sciences*

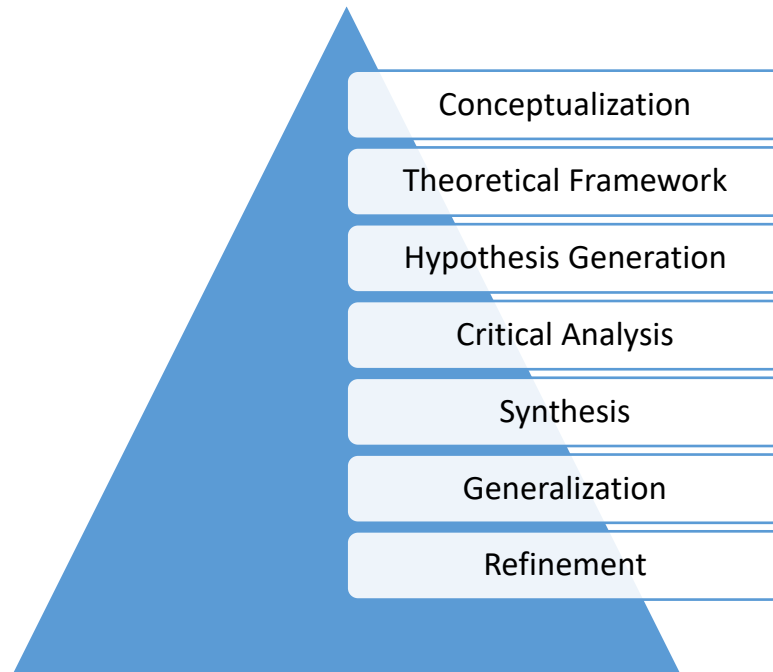***Jel Classification****: B4, D0, D83, C1*

Introduction

Without conceptual and theoretical reviews, researchers may lack a solid theoretical foundation upon which to build their research (Adom *et al.*, 2018; Varpio *et al.*, 2020). This can result in studies that are disconnected from existing knowledge and fail to contribute meaningfully to theory development within their respective fields (Boote & Beile, 2005). Without a clear understanding of basic theories and concepts, researchers may struggle to formulate research questions, develop hypotheses, or interpret their findings accurately (Luse *et al.*, 2012). Conceptual and theoretical reviews are essential for framing research questions and identifying gaps in knowledge or understanding. Without these reviews, researchers may overlook important theoretical perspectives or alternative explanations for the phenomena they are studying (Mensah *et al.*, 2020). This can lead to research that fails to address the root causes of social or organizational problems effectively, resulting in ineffective or misguided solutions (Peshkin, 1993).

Literature review methodologies encompass various approaches and techniques for systematically identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing existing research literature on a particular topic or research question (Collins & Stockton, 2018). This approach involves summarizing and synthesizing existing literature in a narrative format. Researchers typically provide a descriptive overview of key concepts, theories, findings, and debates within the field, without necessarily following a strict methodological framework (Mensah *et al.*, 2020). Narrative reviews are often used to provide a broad overview of a topic or to explore emerging trends and debates.

3.0   Theoretical review

Theoretical research involves exploring and developing new concepts, ideas, or frameworks without necessarily conducting experiments or collecting empirical data (Collins & Stockton, 2018). It's about delving into the theoretical underpinnings of a subject to expand understanding, generate hypotheses, or refine existing theories. Theoretical research involves exploring and developing new concepts, ideas, or frameworks without necessarily conducting experiments or collecting empirical data (Hughes *et al.*, 2019). It's about delving into the theoretical underpinnings of a subject to expand understanding, generate hypotheses, or refine existing theories. Theoretical research entails analyzing and conceptualizing ideas, theories, or models to deepen comprehension or propose novel perspectives within a particular field (Luse *et al.*, 2012). Theoretical research focuses on formulating and refining theories, principles, or frameworks through critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis, without direct experimentation or data collection.

Conceptualization

Theoretical Framework

Hypothesis Generation

Critical Analysis

Synthesis

Generalization

Refinement

Figure 1: Basic concepts of theoretical research

Source: Authors' constructs, 2024

Figure 1 above shows The basic concepts of theoretical research include: Conceptualization: Defining and clarifying abstract ideas or constructs; Theoretical Framework: Establishing a structured foundation for analysis and understanding; Hypothesis Generation: Formulating testable predictions or propositions based on theoretical reasoning; Critical Analysis: Evaluating existing theories, models, or concepts to identify gaps or inconsistencies; Synthesis: Integrating diverse perspectives or ideas to develop a comprehensive understanding; Generalization: Extending theoretical insights to broader contexts or applications and Refinement: Iteratively improving and revising theories in light of new evidence or insights.

Theoretical research involves exploring and developing new concepts, ideas, or frameworks without necessarily conducting experiments or collecting empirical data (Collins & Stockton, 2018). It's about delving into the theoretical underpinnings of a subject to expand understanding, generate hypotheses, or refine existing theories (Hughes *et al.*, 2019). Theoretical research entails analyzing and conceptualizing ideas, theories, or models to deepen comprehension or propose novel perspectives within a particular field. Theoretical research focuses on formulating and refining theories, principles, or frameworks through critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis, without direct experimentation or data collection (Luse *et al.*, 2012).

Conceptual research involves the exploration and development of abstract ideas, theories, or models without necessarily conducting empirical experiments or collecting data. It focuses on conceptualizing and refining theories, frameworks, or paradigms within a particular field of study.

4.0 Theoretical Research vs. Conceptual Research

Focus:

Theoretical research focuses on developing, refining, and testing theories or models within a specific field. Conceptual research concentrates on exploring and refining abstract ideas, concepts, or frameworks without necessarily testing them empirically (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

Empirical Testing:

Theoretical research often involves empirical testing through experiments, observations, or data analysis to validate or refine theories (Hughes *et al.*, 2019). Conceptual research does not necessarily involve empirical testing; it focuses on developing and clarifying concepts, theories, or frameworks (Peshkin, 1993).

Application:

Theoretical research aims to generate insights that can be applied to real-world phenomena or practical problems within a field. Conceptual research contributes to the theoretical foundations of a discipline and may indirectly inform practical applications but is primarily focused on developing conceptual understanding (Varpio *et al.*, 2020).
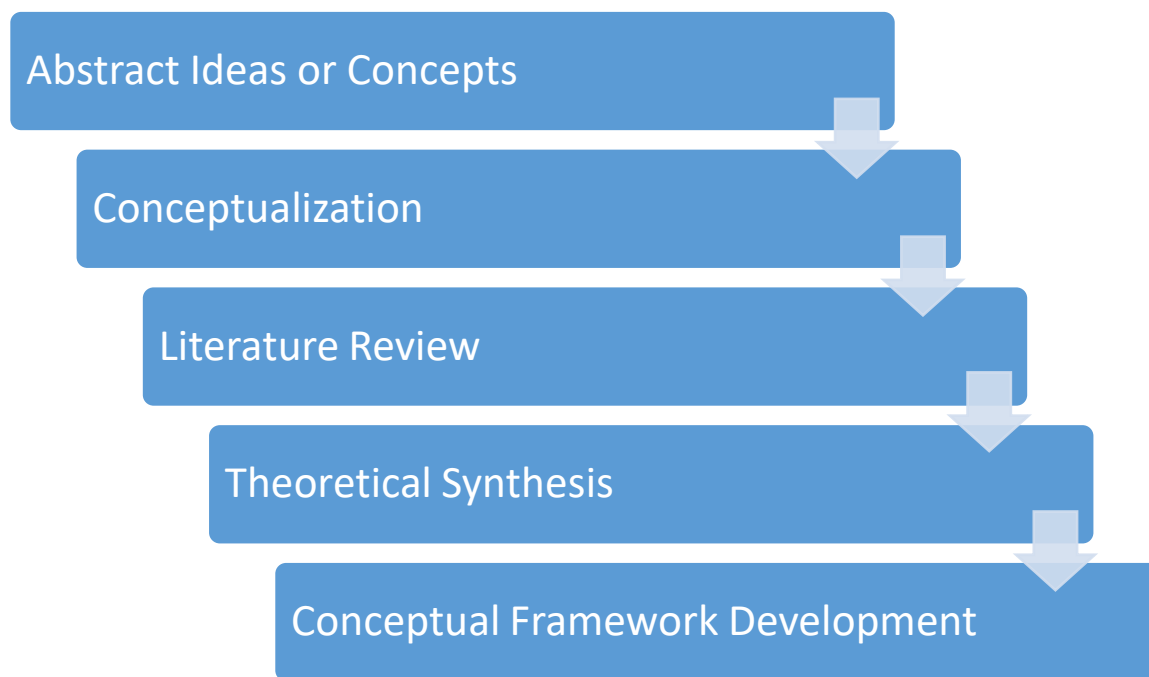
Components of Conceptual Research

Abstract Ideas or Concepts: Conceptual research begins with identifying abstract ideas or concepts within a particular domain. These concepts may be theoretical constructs, philosophical principles, or abstract notions that form the basis of inquiry (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

Conceptualization: The process of conceptualization involves defining and clarifying these abstract ideas or concepts. This step is crucial for establishing a common understanding of the concepts under investigation and ensuring clarity in communication.

Literature Review: Conceptual research typically involves a comprehensive review of existing literature to explore how these abstract concepts have been conceptualized and studied by other researchers. This literature review helps to identify gaps, contradictions, or areas for further exploration.

Theoretical Synthesis: Drawing from the literature review, conceptual research involves synthesizing various theoretical perspectives, models, or frameworks related to the abstract concepts of interest. This synthesis helps to develop a comprehensive understanding of the concepts and their implications.

Conceptual Framework Development: Based on the synthesized theoretical perspectives, conceptual research entails developing a conceptual framework. This framework provides a visual or written representation of the key concepts, variables, and relationships under investigation. It helps to organize the abstract ideas into a coherent structure and guide the research process.

Figure 2: Components of Conceptual Research

Source: Authors' View, 2024

3.0   Theoretical Review

3.1   Theoretical research

Karl Popper is known for his philosophy of science, particularly his emphasis on falsifiability as a criterion for scientific theories (Collins & Stockton, 2018). He advocated for the critical testing

and refutation of theories through empirical evidence, which aligns with the methodology of theoretical research. Thomas Kuhn's work on scientific revolutions highlighted the role of paradigms in guiding scientific inquiry. He emphasized the importance of theoretical frameworks in shaping research agendas and guiding scientific progress. Imre Lakatos expanded on Popper's ideas by introducing the concept of research programs (Collins & Stockton, 2018). He argued that scientific progress occurs through the development and refinement of research programs, which consist of a core set of theories surrounded by a protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses. This approach emphasizes the iterative nature of theoretical research and the role of empirical testing in refining theories.

3.2   **Conceptual research**

John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy emphasized the importance of conceptual analysis in clarifying and resolving philosophical problems (Crawford, 2020). According to Crawford (2020), John Dewey advocated for a problem-solving approach to philosophy, which involves the systematic analysis and conceptualization of abstract ideas. Charles Sanders Peirce, a pioneer of semiotics and pragmatism, emphasized the role of conceptual frameworks in interpreting and making sense of experience. He argued that conceptual frameworks serve as tools for organizing and structuring knowledge, guiding inquiry, and facilitating understanding. Ludwig Wittgenstein's work on language and meaning highlighted the importance of conceptual clarification in philosophical inquiry. He argued that many philosophical problems arise from misunderstandings or confusions about the meaning of concepts, and resolving these problems requires careful analysis and conceptual clarification.

By drawing on the insights of these authorities and proponents, Researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the methodologies underlying theoretical research and conceptual research (Hughes *et al.*, 2019). These methodologies emphasize the importance of critical analysis, conceptual clarification, and empirical testing in advancing knowledge and understanding within their respective domains.

Researchers in social sciences and management sciences generally recognize the importance of adopting both conceptual reviews and theoretical reviews in addressing knowledge gaps and enhancing understanding of basic theories. Here's how researchers may view the adoption of these approaches:

Importance of Conceptual Reviews

Conceptual reviews are valued for their ability to provide clarity and synthesis of existing knowledge within a particular domain or research topic. They help researchers understand the foundational concepts, key constructs, and relationships, especially when there is a lack of deep understanding in basic theories. Conceptual reviews enable researchers to identify gaps, inconsistencies, or areas of ambiguity in the existing literature (Hughes *et al.*, 2019). By systematically reviewing and organizing previous research findings, conceptual reviews highlight areas where further theoretical development or empirical investigation is needed (Varpio *et al.*,

2020). Conceptual reviews allow researchers to customize and adapt theoretical frameworks or conceptual models to fit the specific context of their research. This flexibility is particularly useful when existing theories may not fully capture the complexities or nuances of the phenomena under study.

Importance of Theoretical review

Theoretical reviews play a crucial role in theory development and refinement within social sciences and management sciences. Researchers evaluate and critique existing theories, identify theoretical gaps or inconsistencies, and propose new conceptual frameworks or theoretical models (Mensah *et al.*, 2020; Peshkin, 1993). Theoretical reviews contribute to the rigor and credibility of research by grounding it in established theories and frameworks. By providing a solid theoretical foundation, theoretical reviews enhance the validity and reliability of research findings, especially in fields where there may be a lack of consensus or clarity on basic theories (Mensah *et al.*, 2020). Theoretical reviews facilitate the integration and synthesis of diverse theoretical perspectives from multiple disciplines or research traditions. Theoretical review help researchers connect disparate bodies of literature, identify common themes or patterns, and develop comprehensive theoretical frameworks that can explain complex phenomena in social and management sciences (Mensah *et al.*, 2020).

Balancing Conceptual and Theoretical Approaches

Researchers recognize that both conceptual reviews and theoretical reviews offer complementary perspectives on knowledge synthesis and theory development (Crawford, 2020). While conceptual reviews focus on synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying gaps, theoretical reviews delve deeper into theoretical debates, critiques, and advancements. Researchers often adopt an iterative approach, combining conceptual and theoretical reviews throughout the research process. They may begin with a broad conceptual review to gain an overview of the research landscape, followed by a more focused theoretical review to refine their theoretical framework and hypotheses. This iterative process allows researchers to refine their understanding, address knowledge gaps, and develop robust theoretical foundations for their research (Crawford, 2020).

Given the interdisciplinary nature of many research topics in social and management sciences, researchers recognize the value of interdisciplinary collaboration in adopting both conceptual and theoretical approaches. Collaborative efforts involving scholars from different disciplines can enrich the theoretical discourse, foster innovation, and generate new insights that transcend disciplinary boundaries (Varpio *et al.*, 2020). Researchers in social sciences and management sciences view the adoption of both conceptual reviews and theoretical reviews as essential for addressing knowledge gaps, enhancing understanding of basic theories, and advancing theory development within their respective fields (Hughes *et al.*, 2019). By adopting a balanced approach that combines synthesis of existing knowledge with critical evaluation and refinement of

theoretical frameworks, researchers can contribute to the advancement of knowledge and the development of robust theoretical foundations for future research.

In social sciences, theoretical research helps to develop and refine theories that explain human behavior, societal structures, and cultural phenomena. These theories provide frameworks for understanding complex social dynamics and informing social policies and interventions. Conceptual research in social sciences contributes to clarifying abstract concepts, defining key constructs, and developing conceptual frameworks that guide empirical investigations. It helps to establish a common language and conceptual basis for research within the discipline. Theoretical frameworks in social sciences provide structured approaches to analyzing and interpreting social phenomena. They offer lenses through which researchers can understand and explain patterns of behavior, social interactions, and institutional dynamics. Conceptual frameworks in social sciences visually represent key concepts, variables, and relationships within theoretical frameworks. They help researchers to organize their thinking, identify relevant factors, and develop hypotheses for empirical testing.

Theoretical research in management sciences contributes to the development of theories and models that explain organizational behavior, leadership dynamics, strategic decision-making, and performance outcomes (Luse *et al.*, 2012). These theories provide insights into effective management practices and organizational effectiveness. Conceptual research in management sciences focuses on clarifying abstract concepts, defining key constructs, and developing conceptual frameworks that guide empirical studies in management research. It helps to establish a theoretical basis for understanding and addressing managerial challenges. Theoretical frameworks in management sciences offer structured approaches to analyzing and interpreting organizational phenomena. They provide frameworks for diagnosing organizational problems, designing interventions, and evaluating managerial strategies. Conceptual frameworks in management sciences visually represent key concepts, variables, and relationships within theoretical frameworks. They help researchers to map out the complex dynamics of organizational behavior, decision-making processes, and performance outcomes.

Research that lacks conceptual and theoretical grounding may struggle to gain traction within academic and professional communities (Varpio *et al.*, 2020). Without a strong theoretical foundation, research findings may be perceived as lacking rigor or credibility, reducing their impact and relevance within the field. This can hinder researchers' ability to disseminate their findings, attract funding, or influence policy and practice. Conceptual and theoretical reviews play a crucial role in ensuring the ethical conduct of research. By providing a clear rationale and theoretical justification for their studies, researchers can demonstrate the importance and validity of their research questions and methodologies. Without proper theoretical grounding, researchers may face ethical dilemmas related to the relevance, validity, or ethical implications of their research, potentially compromising the integrity of their findings or the well-being of research participants.

Conceptual and theoretical reviews often serve as bridges between different disciplines and research traditions, facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge exchange (Crawford, 2020). Without these reviews, researchers may miss opportunities to leverage insights

from related fields or engage with diverse perspectives and methodologies. This can limit the richness and depth of research findings and hinder efforts to address complex societal challenges that require interdisciplinary approaches. Conceptual and theoretical reviews are essential components of the research process that contribute to researchers' professional development and scholarly growth. By engaging with existing literature, critically evaluating theoretical frameworks, and synthesizing diverse perspectives, researchers enhance their analytical skills, critical thinking abilities, and theoretical understanding. Without exposure to conceptual and theoretical reviews, researchers may miss out on valuable opportunities for intellectual engagement and scholarly discourse, potentially hindering their professional development and advancement within the academic community.

Failure to conduct conceptual and theoretical reviews perpetuates knowledge gaps and contributes to the fragmentation of the research landscape. Without systematic efforts to synthesize and integrate existing knowledge, researchers may inadvertently reinforce silos within the field, hindering progress toward a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena. This fragmentation can impede efforts to address pressing societal challenges and limit opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation (Varpio *et al.*, 2020).

Integration of theoretical reviews and conceptual reviews in the research process of social sciences and management sciences

Integrating theoretical reviews and conceptual reviews in the research process of social sciences and management sciences can be highly beneficial, offering a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. Theoretical reviews provide a solid foundation by synthesizing existing theories and frameworks relevant to the research topic. This helps researchers understand the conceptual underpinnings and theoretical debates surrounding the phenomenon of interest. For instance, in social sciences, integrating theories such as social identity theory (Anfara & Mertz, 2015) and symbolic interactionism (Caliendo & Kyle, 1996) can provide a nuanced understanding of group dynamics and social interactions.

Theoretical reviews guide hypothesis formulation by highlighting key concepts, variables, and relationships derived from established theories. By integrating theories from different perspectives, researchers can develop more comprehensive hypotheses that account for multiple dimensions of the phenomenon. For example, in management sciences, integrating theories such as contingency theory (Anfara & Mertz, 2015) and resource-based view (Caliendo & Kyle, 1996) can inform hypotheses about the relationship between organizational strategy and performance.

Conceptual reviews complement theoretical reviews by providing a conceptual framework for organizing and structuring the research. Conceptual models derived from the literature help

researchers visualize the relationships between variables and develop a roadmap for data collection and analysis. Drawing on concepts such as stakeholder theory (Caliendo & Kyle, 1996) and agency theory (Chukwuere, 2021), researchers in social and management sciences can construct conceptual models that elucidate the dynamics of organizational behavior and decision-making processes.

Focusing extensively on existing theories and conceptual frameworks may limit researchers' exploration of novel ideas or emergent phenomena. This can lead to a lack of innovation in research and a failure to capture evolving dynamics in social and management contexts. Theoretical reviews often involve synthesizing a diverse array of theories and perspectives, which can result in fragmentation or conflicting interpretations (Torraco, 2005). Integrating multiple theories may lead to conceptual ambiguity or theoretical inconsistencies if not carefully reconciled. Conceptual reviews are subject to researchers' interpretation and judgment, which may introduce bias or oversimplify complex phenomena. Researchers' preconceptions and theoretical preferences can influence the selection and interpretation of concepts, potentially limiting the scope or validity of the conceptual framework (Varpio *et al.*, 2020).

Integrating theoretical and conceptual reviews promotes theory-driven research approaches, where hypotheses and research questions are grounded in established theories and conceptual frameworks. This enhances the rigor and validity of research findings by ensuring theoretical coherence and alignment with existing knowledge. By integrating theories from multiple disciplines, researchers can gain interdisciplinary insights into social and management phenomena. This interdisciplinary perspective facilitates a holistic understanding of complex phenomena, enriching theoretical discourse and informing practical applications.

The integration of theoretical and conceptual reviews enhances the practical relevance of research in social and management sciences by bridging the gap between theory and practice. By elucidating the underlying mechanisms and dynamics of social and organizational phenomena, research findings can inform evidence-based decision-making and managerial practices. Integrating theoretical and conceptual reviews in the research process of social and management sciences offers a robust foundation for theory-driven inquiry, interdisciplinary synthesis, and practical application, thereby advancing knowledge and facilitating informed decision-making (Hughes *et al.*, 2019).

In social and management sciences, theoretical reviews play a crucial role in providing researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge landscape. By synthesizing various theories and frameworks relevant to the research topic, theoretical reviews offer insights into the underlying principles, concepts, and debates shaping the field. For example, in social sciences, integrating theories such as social identity theory and symbolic interactionism can provide researchers with a nuanced understanding of group dynamics, intergroup relations, and identity formation processes.

Theoretical reviews guide hypothesis formulation by identifying key concepts, variables, and relationships derived from established theories. By drawing on theories from different perspectives, researchers can develop more comprehensive hypotheses that account for multiple

dimensions of the phenomenon under study (Varpio *et al.*, 2020). For instance, in management sciences, integrating theories such as contingency theory and resource-based view can inform hypotheses about the relationship between environmental uncertainty, organizational capabilities, and firm performance.

Conceptual reviews complement theoretical reviews by providing a conceptual framework for organizing and structuring the research. Conceptual models derived from the literature help researchers visualize the relationships between variables and develop a roadmap for data collection and analysis. For example, drawing on concepts such as stakeholder theory and agency theory, researchers can construct conceptual models that elucidate the dynamics of organizational behavior, decision-making processes, and stakeholder interactions (Hughes *et al.*, 2019).

While theoretical and conceptual reviews provide a solid foundation for research, there is a risk of overlooking novelty or emergent phenomena by focusing exclusively on existing theories and frameworks. To address this limitation, researchers should remain open to exploring new ideas and alternative perspectives that may challenge or extend existing knowledge. Theoretical reviews often involve synthesizing a diverse array of theories and perspectives, which can result in fragmentation or conflicting interpretations. Integrating multiple theories may lead to conceptual ambiguity or theoretical inconsistencies if not carefully reconciled. Researchers should strive to reconcile divergent theories and identify commonalities to develop a coherent theoretical framework that integrates diverse perspectives (Leshem & Trafford, 2007; Miles *et al.*, 2014).

Conceptual reviews are subject to researchers' interpretation and judgment, which may introduce bias or oversimplify complex phenomena (Peshkin, 1993). Researchers' preconceptions and theoretical preferences can influence the selection and interpretation of concepts, potentially limiting the scope or validity of the conceptual framework. To mitigate conceptual bias, researchers should adopt a critical and reflexive approach, acknowledging their own biases and striving for balance and inclusivity in the conceptualization process. By integrating theories from multiple disciplines, researchers can gain interdisciplinary insights into social and management phenomena. This interdisciplinary perspective facilitates a holistic understanding of complex phenomena, enriching theoretical discourse and informing practical applications. For example, integrating theories from psychology, sociology, economics, and organizational behavior can provide a more comprehensive understanding of individual and organizational behavior in social and management contexts.

The integration of theoretical and conceptual reviews enhances the practical relevance of research in social and management sciences by bridging the gap between theory and practice (Varpio *et al.*, 2020). By elucidating the underlying mechanisms and dynamics of social and organizational phenomena, research findings can inform evidence-based decision-making and managerial practices. For example, theoretical insights into leadership styles and organizational culture can inform strategies for enhancing employee motivation, engagement, and performance in organizational settings. Integrating theoretical and conceptual reviews in the research process of social and management sciences offers a robust foundation for theory-driven inquiry, interdisciplinary synthesis, and practical application, thereby advancing knowledge and facilitating informed decision-making (Yamauchi *et al.*, 2017).

Summary, conclusion and recommendations

In summary, theoretical and conceptual research, as well as theoretical and conceptual frameworks, provide the theoretical foundations, conceptual clarity, and analytical tools necessary for advancing knowledge and understanding in social sciences, management sciences, business, and finance, ultimately contributing to evidence-based decision-making, policy formulation, and organizational effectiveness.

The implications of not using conceptual reviews and theoretical reviews in social sciences and management sciences research extend beyond individual research studies to impact the credibility, relevance, and ethical integrity of research findings, as well as the advancement of knowledge and professional development within the field. By prioritizing conceptual and theoretical grounding in their research processes, researchers can enhance the quality, impact, and relevance of their work, contributing to a deeper understanding of social and organizational phenomena and informing evidence-based decision-making and practice.

Incorporating theoretical and conceptual reviews alongside empirical studies is crucial for social sciences and management sciences researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena. Theoretical reviews provide a solid foundation by synthesizing existing theories, guiding researchers in formulating research questions, and generating hypotheses. By examining the theoretical underpinnings of a subject, researchers can identify gaps, contradictions, or emerging trends in the literature, fostering the development and refinement of theories within their disciplines. Additionally, conceptual reviews enhance clarity by defining key concepts, constructs, and relationships, facilitating the customization of frameworks to specific research contexts or objectives. Together, theoretical and conceptual reviews offer researchers a structured approach to analyze and interpret empirical findings, guiding the design and implementation of empirical studies within social sciences and management sciences.

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