



# PHILOSOPHIES AND FRAMEWORKS OF UNDERSTANDING

A Humanistic Approach  
to Uncovering Consumer Insights



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EMIC

## PHILOSOPHIES AND FRAMEWORKS

The attempt to understand and influence human beings and their thought process and behaviors is one of the greatest challenges of the modern world - perhaps more challenging even than sending human beings to Mars. Because while celestial objects and rockets abide by the laws of physics, and the fuel that is used to propel those rockets abide by the laws of chemistry, human behavior does not predictably follow any natural laws of the universe but instead follows the imperfect and ever-changing influences governing their own individuality and sociality. As much as we would like human beings to be understandable in ways that are predictable and consistent, the fact is that human beings, with our highly complex brains and constantly evolving social connections, are largely unpredictable.

The desire to understand humans in a highly structured, organized and predictable way has grown out of the history and ability of natural scientists to describe and predict the natural world in clear and predictable ways. And while we Homo sapiens are of the natural world, it is also very clear that we operate outside of the natural world in that we seek to control the impact of the natural world on us in ways that other living creatures cannot. While politicians, economists, and marketers alike would by all measures like to simplify the understanding of human beings to a process of research and analysis as laid out by the natural sciences and their convenient and comfortable ability to predict future outcomes, the philosophies and approaches of the natural sciences do not neatly extend to the study of human thought and behavior.

As a basic and highly impactful example of the unpredictable

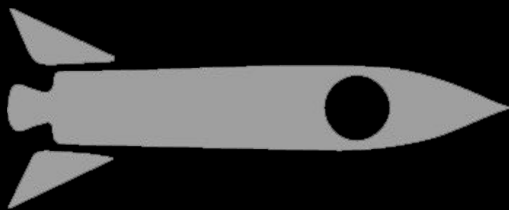
## PHILOSOPHIES AND FRAMEWORKS

nature of human beings, we can look to the movements of the stock markets and the human behavior that drives those movements, which experts and analysts are still unable to accurately predict after many years and billions of dollars of effort and analysis. The desire to understand and predict the future movement of markets requires the implication that the human world operate like the physical world - in a way that lends itself to modeling like chemical reactions or the movement of planets. However, as researchers and students of human thought and behavior we must be clear that we are not in the business of uncovering timeless truths, but instead in constructing inherently imperfect theories.

**“It’s not  
rocket  
science. It’s  
social  
science.”**

- Clement Mok -

This is not by any means to say that the attempt to understand human beings and their perceptions and behaviors is a pointless endeavor or that the imperfect theories that we may construct are not useful. To the contrary, the study of human beings is extremely useful but we must be clear from the outset about the certainty with which we can understand and predict various aspects of human nature and human behavior. While we may never be able to offer absolute certainty about future human events, what we can do is attempt to understand the variety of influences that impact human behavior in an effort to influence future human behavior.



# THE FOUNDATION OF EMIC

Emic (pronounced ee-mik) exists to fill the need for deeper, more critical, and more meaningful research, analysis, and insights that put the central influence of our humanity and the various impacts of the human experience at the core of the effort to understand and influence consumers. We believe the philosophies, frameworks, and structures of analysis for understanding human behavior have been developed and refined by thought leaders in the social sciences and humanities, and should therefore be brought to bear upon the examination of human perception and behavior in the context of consumer focused business decisions.

An unstructured or scattershot approach to research that does not have guiding principles upon which to formulate analyses, may result in a disconnect between consumer behavior and the influences that drive that behavior. We are firm in our conviction that there is a better, and more insightful way to analyze consumers and their beliefs and behaviors by examining consumers holistically, in the context of the deep influence of humanity and the human experience, so that we can provide deeper insights that can be used to build and strengthen consumer relationships and influence their behaviors.

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## THE MEANING OF 'EMIC'

The term 'emic' comes from the discipline of anthropology and refers to a culture specific approach to research which seeks to uncover how a culture is understood in its own terms. The emic approach is a subject-oriented research approach that investigates and explains people from the insider's perspective and provides an analysis of behavior and beliefs in the context of what is meaningful, both consciously and unconsciously, to the research subject.

## PHILOSOPHIES AND FRAMEWORKS

The emic approach to research and analysis seeks to understand how people perceive and categorize their world, what their rules for behavior and thought are, what has meaning for them, and how they imagine and explain things. Emic research and analysis provides the “native viewpoint” and highlights those aspects of relationships, experiences, and life that have significance to them.

The term ‘emic’ is specifically derived from the field of linguistics and the concepts of:

- **PHONEMES** which are distinct units of sound particular to a language that make a meaningful difference in that language
- **PHONEMIC ANALYSIS** which seeks to uncover the largely unconscious rules for sound patterning that are found in the mind of a person who speaks a particular language by investigating phonemes

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A phonemic analysis describes the way sounds function within a given language to encode meaning in that language and phonemics, refers to the subjective understanding of those meanings. In comparison, phonetics, which is a term that is much more frequently heard and recognized, refers to the objective physiological and acoustic study of speech sounds which covers all sounds used in all languages and relies only on the physical characteristics of those sounds without regard to their systemic patterns of usage in a given language. So while phonetics studies the physical sounds humans produce in speech, phonemics studies how humans structure and understand those sounds.

## PHILOSOPHIES AND FRAMEWORKS

### PHONETICS [fəʊ-'ne-tiks]

concerned with the physical characteristics of sounds that are possible with the human voice across all languages, but not of the context or meanings of patterns of sounds in any specific language

### PHONEMICS \fə-'nē-miks\

concerned with the patterns and distribution of sound in specific languages and how distinct changes in sounds change the meaning of what is being spoken in ways that are recognizable to speakers of that language

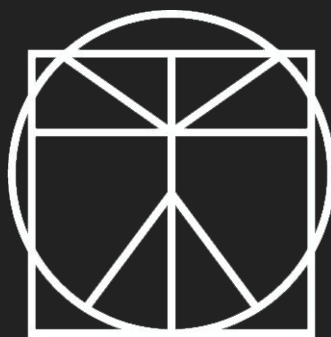
EXAMPLE \ɪgzæmpəl\ - the phonetic difference between river \rɪvər\ and liver \lɪvər\ exists in the realm of possibility for the human voice, but has no meaningful phonemic difference in the Asian languages as they lack the \l\ and \r\ phonemes

At Emic we seek to uncover, decode, and decipher discrete units of the consumer and human experience through basing our principles of research and analysis in the emic approach to research and analysis as developed and understood in anthropology and phonemics. This approach provides a structured methodology for categorizing human perception and action, analyzing it, and restructuring our analysis in a way that acknowledges the deep roots of humanity, and the great meaning and significance our conscious and unconscious influences have on the research subject under investigation. We do this by following the philosophies and frameworks of a variety of disciplines and schools of thought in the humanities and social sciences.

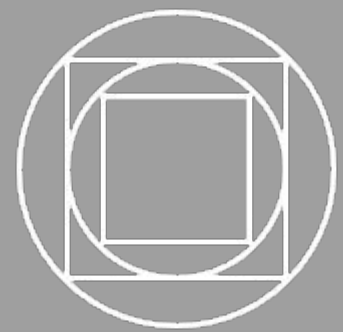
### PHENOMENOLOGY



### ANTHROPOLOGY



### HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY



# ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology is the broad and holistic study of human beings and the discipline of anthropology provides our tactical framework for the study and analysis of human and consumer behavior. Anthropology is structured across four sub-disciplines including:

### ARCHAEOLOGY

seeks to understand changes in human history through the examination of the past in historical written documents and material remains or artifacts

### CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

seeks to understand living people through their relationships, interactions, and the social structures which bind and divide groups

### BIOLOGICAL/EVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGY

seeks to understand and describe the biological structures of modern humans and their ancestors through the evolutionary influences that have led to biologically and psychologically modern humans in the present

### LINGUISTICS

seeks to understand the development and influence of human language and the meanings behind how language is structured and how those meanings impact human perception of the world around them

The holistic framework of Anthropology provides an overarching structure that guides our humanistic approach to research and analysis. While we do not limit ourselves to anthropological methods in our effort to strategically understand human beings and consumers, we are guided by the broad anthropological principle that the human experience is influenced by the four central aspects of humanity that form the core of

**“Anthropology is the most humanistic of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities.”**

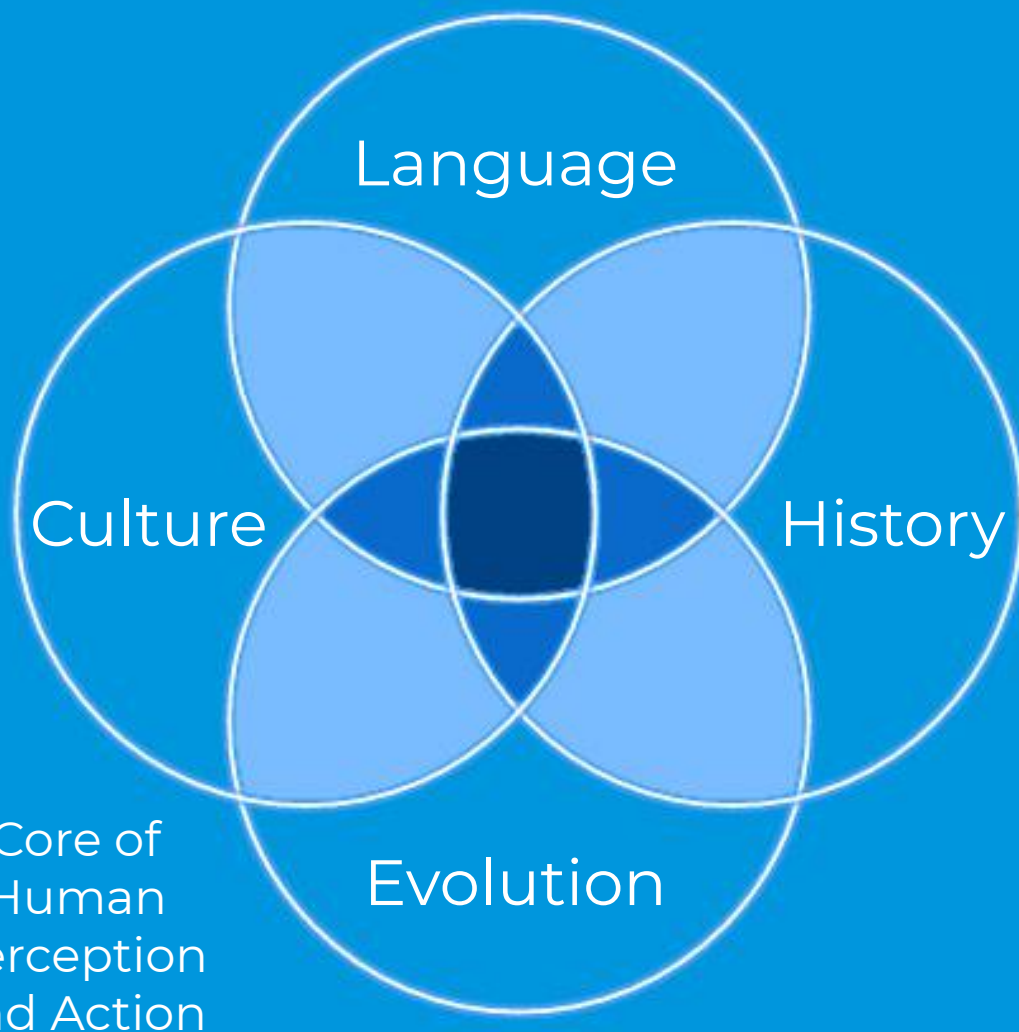
- Alfred L Kroeber -



## PHILOSOPHIES AND FRAMEWORKS

anthropological inquiry as investigated through the four previously mentioned subdisciplines of Anthropology.

- **Language** - Language and intention signifies meaning to both ourselves and others in our attitudes, aspirations, and fears.
- **Culture** - We live in a world of diverse social norms and influences that impact what we think and how we act.
- **History** - Individual and collective histories impact our present and future attitudes and actions.
- **Evolution** - Our species is greatly influenced by the evolution of psychological traits that impacts our success and survival.





# HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

Humanistic Psychology began as a school of thought against Behavioural Psychology's insistence on applying the methods of objective natural science to human behavior. Humanistic psychology also rejects psychoanalysis' strict emphasis on the unconscious mind which relegated the conscious mind to relative unimportance. Humanistic psychology restores the importance of consciousness and offer a more holistic view of human life. Humanistic psychology acknowledges that the mind is strongly influenced by both determining forces in society and the unconscious, and emphasizes the conscious capacity of individuals to influence their own perceptions and behaviors.

Humanistic psychology recognizes that human existence consists of multiple layers of reality and it contests the idea that the only legitimate research method is an experimental test using

**While other psychological approaches ask "What is this person like?" - humanistic psychology asks "What is it like to be this person?"**

quantitative data. It argues for the use of additional methods specifically designed to study qualitative factors such as subjective experience, emotion, perception, memory, values, and beliefs.

Instead of the objective view of people argued for by other psychological approaches which in essence asks "What is this person like?" - Humanistic Psychology seeks to understand people's subjectivity, asking, "What is it like to be this person?"

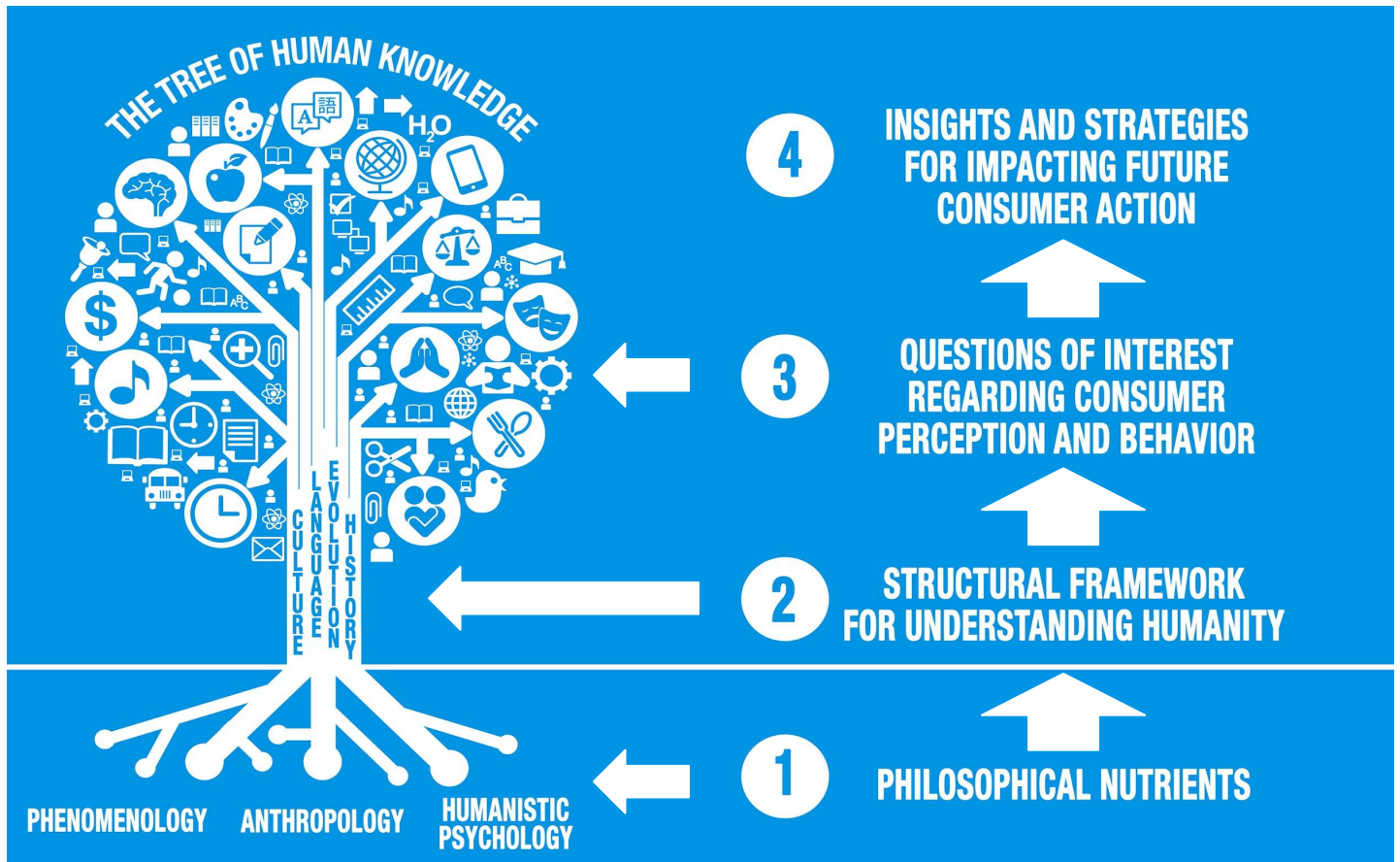
### PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is a school of thought in philosophy in which the study of experience and how we experience is central to understanding humanity and human choice. It studies structures of conscious experience and intentionality as experienced from a subjective or first-person point of view and analyzes conditions of the possibility of intentionality involving habits, background, social practices and language.

Experience, in a phenomenological sense, includes not only the relatively passive experiences of sensory perception, but also imagination, thought, emotion, desire, agency, and action. It includes everything that we think, experience or do. However we are often not explicitly conscious of our intentional or unintentional patterns of action, and the domain of Phenomenology includes both semi-conscious and unconscious mental activity.

Phenomenology is grounded in several assumptions that explain the foundations of this philosophical approach to understanding social phenomena:

- ① Phenomenology challenges the unquestioned idea of objective research and requires consciously confronting biases and assumptions in order to explain a phenomenon in terms of its own inherent system of meaning.
- ② Phenomenology believes that a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of life exists within analyses of our daily practices.
- ③ Phenomenologists believe in the importance of exploring persons rather than individuals, in that persons are understood through the unique ways in which they are reflective of particular social, cultural, and historical life circumstances.
- ④ Phenomenologists prefer to see research subjects as participants or co-researchers and they seek to gather information about conscious experience that is given significance through one's own interpretation
- ⑤ Phenomenology encourages a discovery-oriented approach that does not specify beforehand what it intends to find.



## MEANING AND INTENTIONALITY

There is meaning in everything we do. Even in our subconscious biases and behaviors, and in the taken-for-granted experiences that are reflected in our everyday interactions, there is meaning and significance that explains who we are and what we do in a way that reflects paradigms and microcosms of larger cultural, political, and societal structures.

At Emic we ascribe great meaning to our intentional and explicit approach to research and analysis based on the philosophical underpinnings that inform our effort to understand and influence human and consumer behavior. If you would like to discuss your most challenging questions, or if you just want to talk philosophies and frameworks for improving what you do, or how we might improve our approach to offer deeper and more meaningful insights, we would love to talk. Our passion is uncovering insightful answers and developing innovative solutions to human and consumer problems.