

# Better Marketing for a Better World

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Consider the following quotes:

The marketing discipline today constitutes a great paradox. The nation stands deeply troubled. It seeks solutions to grave problems both within and without its own society. Marketing and marketers are an integral part of this picture, either as a dimension of the problems or as a source of their solutions. Yet the emphasis of marketing study is not directed toward resolving issues of its social relevance, and there is strong and vocal sentiment in the field against being pulled in this direction . . . Relevancy is to be judged in the context of the true life and death issues which currently exist, such as war, poverty, racism, contamination of the environment, loss of self-identity, and the alienation of youth. Certainly, it is an appropriate time for marketers to reflect upon the relevancy of the marketing discipline in such a context.

Profits will continue to be essential and basic to corporate survival, but the major challenge to business today may be to meet the societal needs of a changing environment.

These quotes reflect concerns shared by many marketing academics and practitioners today about marketing's role in creating a better world. Yet they also reflect opportunities lost. These quotes appeared almost exactly 50 years ago in the *Journal of Marketing* special issue on "Marketing's Changing Social/Environmental Role," published in July 1971 (first quote: Dawson 1971, p. 68; second quote: Kelley 1971, p. 1). Reading that issue today, one is struck by the sense of hope represented in those scholars' assessments of the gaps between the topics studied in contemporary research and the opportunities and obligations associated with contemporary society. An awareness of these gaps, the logic seemed to go, should yield interest and pressure on academics to fill them.

How has today's scholarly community fared in its pursuit of "better world" topics? How well have we lived up to the hopes of 50 years ago and the current imperatives? Some answers to these questions are evident in the responses we received from a survey conducted in February 2021 among *JM*'s associate editors and advisory board members. We asked these scholars for their views about research on "Better Marketing for a Better World" (BMBW). By BMBW, we mean the use of marketing

activities and ideas to impact outcomes beyond just what is good for the financial performance of firms: BMBW emphasizes marketing's role in enhancing the welfare of the world's other stakeholders and institutions. To our first question, "How important is the topic of BMBW to the field of marketing?" the mean response from these 44 scholars was 6.34 on a 7-point scale. More than 60% gave the highest score in response to this question. However, when asked "To what degree has the field addressed BMBW topics?" and "How effectively do you think the field has addressed BMBW topics?" over 80% rated the current status of the field as 4 or below. While this is a select sample, our discussions with many other scholars point to the same conclusion.

This BMBW special issue is motivated by the gap that remains between what is studied in our field and what is possible. We believe that we still know too little about marketing's role in improving—or harming—our world. Unless we broaden the set of outcomes we study and change how we interpret marketing's role, marketing scholars risk becoming detached from many of the most important challenges facing the world today—challenges to which marketing can contribute both positively and negatively (Kotler and Levy 1969), such as persistent poverty, inequity, illiteracy, insecurity, disease, climate change, pollution, and human trafficking, among many others. Even in wealthy nations such as the United States, large proportions of the population believe the world is getting worse and that the system is stacked against them (Rosling, Rosling, and Rönnlund 2018). Those perceptions are not necessarily wrong. The "American Dream," which many marketers helped shape, is an illusion for many (Chetty et al. 2014; Coskuner-

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Balli 2020). Discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation continues to keep millions from achieving their hopes and dreams (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Crockett and Grier 2021). “Deaths of despair” caused by suicide, drug overdoses, and alcohol-related liver disease among non-college-educated white men and women have become so high that life expectancy for the U.S. population had begun to decline even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit (Case and Deaton 2020). Moreover, these issues are not confined to the United States. Social mobility has declined in many nations (Alesina et al. 2021). Extreme weather caused by climate change is uprooting lives and threatening livelihoods, while markets for green solutions are still largely nascent or poorly organized.

Surveying the challenges facing the world, a recent report commissioned by the CEOs of companies such as Alibaba, Mars, Merck, and Unilever (Business and Sustainable Development Commission 2017, p. 19) concludes: “Despite the economic and social gains of the past 30 years, the world’s current economic model is deeply flawed.” Marketing and marketplace exchanges are not peripheral to the world’s economic model; they are in fact central to it. The world has no shortage of consequential challenges that should interest marketing scholars.

Fifty years after *JM* authors and editors made the case for it, the need for the scholarly study of BMBW is even more intense. The research represented in this special issue demonstrates that our discipline has no shortage of talent or tools with which to address these challenges. The record-setting number of 239 submissions that we received for this special issue suggests an intellectual ferment in our discipline that foreshadows new developments. Against this backdrop, we believe the time is ripe for BMBW research to occupy a more central position in the mainstream of marketing scholarship.

## Toward the Center Stage: Rethinking Marketing for a Better World

During the past 50 years, the field has made noteworthy progress in its pursuit of BMBW research.<sup>1</sup> Many scholars—more than we can list—have drawn our field’s attention to necessary and important research in this domain. Indeed, some have devoted their lives to this cause. Insights from research have helped the push for change on several important issues, including tobacco advertising, deceptive advertising, labeling, recycling, and the application of marketing tools to nonprofit and social marketing campaigns. Encouragingly, empirical work of

this nature has surged in all the leading journals in the field. This work has covered topics as diverse as prosocial behavior, environmental sustainability, corporate political advocacy and fraud, consumer privacy, health, and education. Scholars have also begun to integrate empirical findings to develop conceptual frameworks and research agendas for specific BMBW topics (e.g., White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019).

Yet our survey results and discussions with members of the marketing scholarly community suggest that despite these important inroads, BMBW topics remain peripheral to most scholars’ work. Even today, rarely do doctoral dissertations focus on BMBW topics, rarely do sessions at our largest conferences feature BMBW discussions, and rarely do promotion and tenure committees find themselves assessing records of extensive publications on BMBW topics in leading journals. We have not yet realized the full scope of better marketing ideas. Neither have we fully realized the impact that better marketing can have on a better world. This section describes three ways BMBW work can achieve a more central role in our field.

First, we believe that many topics considered mainstream in marketing can be fruitfully viewed from a better world perspective. The authors featured in this special issue, for example, cover a wide array of bread-and-butter marketing topics: sales force management, price promotion, pricing, labeling, product design, product management, social media, the use of influencers, marketing education, marketing consulting, advertising, and targeting. They apply (or study the application of) these familiar marketing tools to better world outcomes. Web Appendix 1 contains a table summarizing these and other key features of the papers in the special issue. Consider the topic of sales force management. Habel, Alavi, and Linsenmayer (2021) find that variable compensation incentive schemes have a negative effect on salespeople’s mental and physical health, increasing sick days and stress, especially among those with fewer personal and social resources. These health outcomes detract from the sales gains achieved from this widely used sales force management tool. Zhang, Chintagunta, and Kalwani (2021) examine the impact of social media and influencers on the adoption of an eco-friendly pesticide in rural China. Kim, Gupta, and Lee (2021) showcase how customer relationship management tools can improve fundraising approaches and outcomes for a nonprofit scientific research center. In a final example, Zhang, Kai, and Shi (2021) demonstrate how price promotions can increase prosocial giving.

Second, we believe marketing scholars should take far more inspiration to find a role for marketing amid better world challenges and opportunities. These topics might, at first glance, appear far from the domain of marketing. Take, for example, discrimination and inequity. Many in the field might view discrimination as the domain of sociologists and psychologists, not marketers. But consumer and consumption responses to stigmatization are surely squarely in the marketing domain (see Crockett 2017). Discrimination can be a by-product of mainstream marketing activities such as targeting and segmentation

<sup>1</sup> BMBW topics have appeared in specialized journals (e.g., those at the intersection of marketing and public policy, ethics, and macro issues) and in articles and occasional special issues such as the current and 1971 *JM* issues, *JMR* on education and marketing, *Marketing Science* on health, *JCR* on transformative consumer research, *JCP* on consumer psychology for the greater good, and *JPP&M* and *JACR* on COVID-19). Such topics are evident in discussions in special interest groups (e.g., the AMA’s Marketing and Society special interest group) and in movements such as the Transformative Consumer Research initiative.

(Ukanwa and Rust 2020); it can be implicit in branding and marketing communications; it is often silently furthered by the algorithms used in marketing; and, importantly, it can be mitigated by marketing training and sales initiatives (Chaney, Sanchez, and Maimon 2019).

Or take poverty, which remains a persistent worldwide problem. It is often studied by economists, demographers, sociologists, and the occasional consumer researcher (Andreasen 1975; Bryant and Hill 2019), but marketing can contribute to or help alleviate poverty. How do other marketing practices (e.g., franchise location decisions that limit access and opportunity and predatory financial services that prey on ill-informed consumers living paycheck-to-paycheck) contribute to the challenges poor consumers face? What drives these practices, and what can be done to mitigate and guard against them?

Third, we believe marketing scholars should consider how a better (or worse) world can and should influence marketing. As Jerry Zaltman—one of our interviewees for this editorial, who was also one of the authors published in the 1971 *JM* special issue—described it, “How can the internal world of a firm not be shaped by the external world?” Indeed, the environment around the firm—physical or otherwise—affects both what is done in marketing and how well it is done. How do (or should) positive or negative changes in the environment change the way marketers think and behave? For example, climate change could affect nearly all aspects of marketing, including new product design, channels of distribution, and brand positions.

We believe all three types of research questions belong in the mainstream of marketing scholarship. What gets in the way? Many things contribute, but we focus on a set of assumptions that drive thinking in the field as the most formidable barrier. We discuss these assumptions and issue a set of challenges to both scholars and gatekeepers.

## Rethinking Assumptions

### *Who Is the Primary Actor Appropriate for Study in Marketing?*

*Assumption: Marketing is what marketers do.* At a superficial level, it may stand to reason that marketing scholars should focus solely on the activities of those with “marketing” in their job titles (e.g., marketing managers, CMOs). But, interestingly, many marketing activities are actually done by individuals who would not consider themselves marketers first and foremost—entrepreneurs, CEOs, general managers, data scientists, product developers, and pricing strategists, to name a few. Many others work in noncommercial organizations as government officials, regulators, and societal critics of marketing. Fixating on the objectives of a narrow set of actors can prevent us from understanding the full impact and potential of marketing activities. For example, many social entrepreneurs see activities that we would regard as marketing, such as generating customer insights, as critical to their work. Similarly, many of those

making pricing decisions would not call themselves marketers, yet their decisions profoundly affect who accesses their firms’ offerings and who does not. For example, accessible pricing for important services such as mobile telephone services has a profound social impact on everything from education to health to poverty alleviation. These topics should serve as legitimate and valuable bases for marketing scholarship.

*Recommendation:* We should engage with the entire phenomenon of marketing rather than solely on the activities undertaken by those who define themselves as marketers. In addition to marketing managers, the protagonists in this special issue include entrepreneurs, policy makers, social marketers, nonprofit and NGO leaders, and consumers. For example, Garbinsky, Mead, and Gregg (2021) offer a marketing intervention that NGOs, policy makers, and financial institutions can use to increase consumer savings that works in both developed and developing markets. As another example, Weihrauch and Huang (2021) offer guidelines for communications on healthy eating that can help policy makers fight the obesity epidemic.

*Assumption: Marketing is what businesses—especially large ones—do.* Most marketing scholars hold their primary affiliation in business schools. Large corporations feature prominently in business school case study lists and recruiter rosters. For researchers, data on large companies are easier to come by. Nevertheless, there are good reasons why large corporations’ problems should not disproportionately preoccupy marketing scholars.

Large corporations employ a small fraction of those engaged in marketing activities worldwide. They are also not the sole focus of business school graduates, who increasingly pursue careers in the social and public sectors. Further, even when they actively seek to do good, many (large) companies still define “better world” outcomes as peripheral to their strategic goals. Despite the efforts of some heroic CEOs and the pronouncements of groups such as the Business Roundtable (2019), the focus on BMBW in the context of large corporations too often seems to boil down to their corporate social responsibility ratings, and even those may be subject to spin and manipulation.

*Recommendation:* We should explore beyond the familiar large businesses most often studied in academic marketing research. There are two shining examples in the special issue. Anderson et al. (2021) focus on entrepreneurs and volunteer consultants and examine how marketing advice affects their growth and the survival of small firms in Uganda. Viswanathan et al. (2021) focus on villagers in India and Tanzania and show how marketing education in the form of marketplace literacy training promotes well-being and entrepreneurship outcomes.

Even in contexts beyond large businesses, we see a related recommendation: we should consider more than just the *average* effect of marketing among consumers, firms, and markets. Averages can conceal variance that is critical to understanding better world outcomes. In a world of few winners and many losers, of oligopolies and inequality, it is cold comfort to the

		Good for the world	
		No	Yes
Good for the firm	No	<p><b>Lose-Lose</b></p> <p>How to avoid myopic marketing actions?</p>	<p><b>Lose-Win</b></p> <p>How to sustain marketing actions that are financially unviable, but can do good?</p>
	Yes	<p><b>Win-Lose</b></p> <p>How to expose and avoid the dark side of marketing?</p>	<p><b>Win-Win</b></p> <p>How to enable marketing actions that benefit multiple stakeholders?</p>

**Figure 1.** The impact of marketing.

Note: “Good” is defined as long-term positive outcomes.

many on the losing side if average outcomes improve. Analyses of heterogeneity in outcomes among consumers and firms offer the opportunity to explore asymmetries in gains and losses. For example, Wang, Lewis, and Singh (2021) show that cigarette excise taxes decrease smoking but result in stronger brands gaining share, while smoke-free restrictions result in stronger brands losing share. Mrkva et al. (2021) similarly observe that social marketing nudges work better for low-knowledge consumers.

### What Should be the Objectives of Marketing (and Research in Marketing)?

*Assumption: The objective of marketing is to improve business profits and shareholder value.* Of course, firms have good reasons to adopt a focus on business profits; many have a fiduciary obligation to do so. Profits offer a clear metric that imposes accountability on managers. Moreover, the financial logic of maximizing shareholder value can be consistent with win-win outcomes for customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and the world at large (Figure 1). However, even the finance field is recognizing the pitfalls of a single-minded and too-often myopic devotion to shareholder value (see Zingales 2020). As Rajan (2020, p. 21) notes, “Ultimately, a corporation sinks or swims on whether it makes a desirable widget, but in order to do this sustainably, it has to weigh the interests of a broader set of stakeholders than just the shareholders.”

Looking beyond profits is important in part because increasing evidence shows that too many contemporary markets are uncompetitive and that instead of earning profits by investing and innovating, powerful firms use political pressure to secure their advantages (Philippon 2019). In such contexts, markets fail to deliver. Rather than win-win, the outcome is win-lose—profits for firms and losses for the world at large (see Figure 1).

Marketing scholars have the opportunity to document evidence on the consequences of bad actors and explain why and how marketing contributes to bad societal outcomes. A potent example is the management consulting company McKinsey’s

set of marketing recommendations to Purdue Pharma, such as using distributor price rebates to promote opioids, which we now know have devastated individuals, families, and entire communities (Bogdanich and Forsythe 2020). What can marketing learn from its societal critics? How should our research amplify these voices in the spirit of shaping better marketing practices for the world? Considering lose-lose outcomes—bad for the world and bad for the firm in the long run—researchers could seek to understand why these actions persist, with the goal of making them less common.

We also see many opportunities for researchers to examine the lose-win cell in Figure 1. This scenario manifests in the many situations in which it is unprofitable for firms to engage in a marketing action that benefits the world at large. How can they nevertheless be incentivized to apply their resources and capabilities and to engage in activities that lead to a “better world”? Many social enterprises, for example, rely on a combination of profits and grants to try to do good. Others collaborate with governments, NGOs, and grassroots entities to do so. What business models are appropriate in these contexts? What collaborations are most effective? What marketing activities offer the most leverage toward better world outcomes?

*Recommendation:* We should examine all four cells described in Figure 1 to develop a full accounting of marketing’s impact on the world and the conditions under which each applies. For example, Mookerjee, Cornil, and Hoegg (2021) show how a lose-win situation of offering steep discounts for imperfect produce can be turned into a win-win situation by combining “ugly” labeling with moderate discounts to increase purchase of imperfect produce that would have otherwise been wasted.

*Assumption: Research in marketing should focus on customer- or firm-level outcomes.* The outcomes often studied in contemporary marketing research typically involve one of these two stakeholders. But what are the negative and positive spillovers of marketing activities beyond customers and firms? The impact of marketing travels much further than most of our

research has acknowledged. As Wilkie and Moore (1999, p. 217) emphasize, “adopting the perspective of the aggregate marketing system helps a person ‘see’ the field of marketing in its true expanse and complexity. However, this perspective largely has disappeared from the marketing mainstream in recent years.” Over 20 years later, not much has changed.

*Recommendation:* We should place a greater emphasis on the spillovers—both positive and negative—of marketing. For example, Sun, Bellezza, and Paharia (2021) observe a positive spillover of spending more to purchase luxury goods: that the products last longer and are more likely to end up in secondary markets rather than a landfill.

### How can BMBW Topics Be Studied?

*Assumption: Better world topics cannot be easily mapped into the marketing field.* We believe that this assumption is not far removed from current reality. To illustrate this point, we conducted a text analysis<sup>2</sup> of the words used in the manuscripts submitted to the BMBW special issue: we compared these words with those used in a random sample of 184 reports that describe the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>3</sup> As a further contrast, we compared the words used in these two sets of documents with those used in *Marketing Management* by Kotler and Keller (2011; hereafter K&K) using a natural language processing (word2vec) model (Berger et al. 2020). Results indicate very little overlap between the marketing and UN documents (see Web Appendix 2 for details).

In terms of the nature of this disconnect, we observe differences in the three sets of documents in (1) the stakeholders addressed, (2) the activities and decisions those stakeholders undertake or are subject to, and (3) outcomes (see Web Appendix 2). In terms of stakeholders, the BMBW submissions are similar to K&K: both documents focused on consumers, customers, and businesses. The UN documents, in contrast, address a larger set of stakeholders (e.g., government, women, environment). Comparing the types of activities and actions, we find that both the BMBW submissions and K&K describe “doing” activities (e.g., “branding,” “designing,” “pricing”), while the UN documents show a preponderance of advocacy and evaluative words (e.g., “ensuring,” “assessing,” “addressing”). Finally, in terms of outcomes, many of the BMBW and K&K words relate to final outcomes (e.g., “choice,” “value,” “profit”), while the UN outcomes are more of an intermediate nature, describing enabling factors such as “publication,” “education,” and “growth.”

*Recommendation:* For our field to reach research, practitioner, and beneficiary communities beyond the traditional ones, we should develop more diverse points of connection through which we can share ideas and insights. Indeed, the

differences in language and areas of focus in our text analysis suggest that we have a large gap to bridge between the world of our scholarly community and that of many practitioners who are actively involved in the pursuit of better world outcomes. Doing so might require us to break out of familiar bubbles and to immerse ourselves more fully in the contexts we seek to understand (van Heerde et al. 2021).

Another recommendation to bridge the gap is for authors to write “Marketing Implications” sections for their papers—a practice we encourage at *JM*. We emphasize that marketing implications are not restricted to managers in firms: all actors who could engage in or influence better marketing are relevant here, including policy makers, educators, and societal stakeholders who challenge marketing activities. We ignore this fact at our own peril (Moorman et al. 2019). We are sure that journals have contributed to this narrowing of perspective, including *JM*—a choice that cuts us off from the full implications of our ideas for the world. For those scholars worrying we will leave managers behind, it is important to remember that managers can and should learn from policy and societal implications if they are to be effective.

*Assumption: BMBW research is value laden—not scientific.* Although all research involves choices that reflect our values, getting involved in BMBW may make some scholars uncomfortable. It is indeed important that we remain scientific and objective, and our call for papers made it clear that there was no place for advocacy in the special issue. Yet we should also recognize that most research is value laden, with some values being more accepted or more enduring than others. In fact, the very goal of maximizing business profits is value laden. We encourage scholars to remain truth tellers in their investigations and to not shy away from investigations that are social and political flashpoints.

*Recommendation:* We may sometimes have to acknowledge that controversy can be a by-product of engaging with a better world, where evidence is often scarce and opinions polarized. At the same time, we should strive for independence and objectivity. For example, Robitaille et al. (2021) take on the challenge of organ donation. Strategies to increase donation rates are hotly debated in policy circles. These authors show that changing the design of the service encounter and the content of the appeal helps improve donation rates. Similarly, Gonzales et al. (2021) take on the highly politicized banning of plastic bags in Chile to understand where the policy design fell short.

*Assumption: BMBW research comes at the expense of rigor.* Friedman (1970, p. 17) made this claim early: “The discussions of the ‘social responsibilities of business’ are notable for their analytical looseness and lack of rigor.” A more contemporary quote from one of our survey respondents reiterates this view: “I think prior work in this area sometimes gets coded as not ‘theoretical’ or sophisticated enough.” An assumption that also surfaces among academics discussing BMBW research is that it is difficult to undertake rigorously because of the lack of access to data sets and the difficulty of running field

<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to Sanjana Rosario for undertaking this analysis on our behalf.

<sup>3</sup> These documents were drawn from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in the Sustainable Development Goals Division and can be found at <https://journalofmktg.org/30HR209>.



experiments to pin down the causal role of marketing actions in generating better world outcomes.

At the same time, if marketing academics believe that studying BMBW is critically important, as our survey results and numerous conversations indicate, then we need to determine how to bring rigor to this research. Big problems demand creative solutions. BMBW can actually provide an opportunity to apply new dimensions of rigor. Indeed, rigorous work is not unknown to the study of “better world” topics. Some scholars have even won Nobel Prizes for their work on topics such as poverty alleviation, externalities, and social justice. Crucially, articles in this special issue provide a clear refutation of the idea that the study of BMBW comes at the expense of rigor (see Web Appendix 1).

*Recommendation:* We should strive to maintain rigor in our BMBW investigations. And we should do so within and across methods. Given *JM*'s broad mission, it is particularly gratifying to see that the articles in this special issue apply a diverse set of methods, including field experiments, quasi-experiments, lab and online studies, surveys, web-scraping, archival methods, netnography, and qualitative interviews. We venture to guess that this is perhaps the most method-diverse special issue ever published in the field of marketing. As highlighted in Web Appendix 1, many papers utilize multiple methods, further enriching this diverse portrait. For example, Rifkin, Du, and Berger (2021) use a series of lab, online, and field experiments to show that requests for small charitable donations can be broadly targeted, beyond prior donors and those who support the cause, simply by offering consumers an opportunity to express their identity.

*Assumption: Doing research on BMBW topics is difficult, especially for junior colleagues.* Research that can create impact at scale is not always easy or cheap to pursue. The timelines involved can be long. For those working in international contexts, distances—both geographic and cultural—can be challenging. Objectives may not be widely agreed upon, partly for reasons noted previously. It follows that metrics for BMBW may also be contentious. Given all this, returns will appear uncertain relative to the risks involved. Well-meaning advisors might warn their students to “stay mainstream” and adopt dissertation topics that can be easily conquered in the time they have. The result is that many young scholars who care deeply about these issues do not pursue BMBW topics in their formative years, hoping instead to do so later in their careers. However, for many, this opportunity never materializes. We are reminded of Warren Buffet's quote (Carricaburu 1996, p. D5): “The chains of habit are too light to be felt until they're too heavy to be broken.”

*Recommendation:* We should be bold in following our passions and ideals. Many marketers entered the profession in the belief that their thinking and their actions could help contribute to a better world. Applicants to doctoral programs in marketing today frequently list this belief as a major rationale for their applications, and conversations with them suggest that many are sincere in their desire to contribute to a better world through

marketing scholarship. Though challenges do exist, so does an openness to fresh new ideas. Moreover, these challenges are not qualitatively different from those in any new area at the cusp of going mainstream. Risky ideas can be combined with less risky ideas in a portfolio of research. Further, risks and the efforts required to mitigate them are potentially more feasible in the early stages of one's career, when teaching and service obligations may be fewer.

To our delight, this special issue involves papers in which doctoral students and recently hired junior faculty have played an important role, including Katherine Du (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), Claudia Gonzalez-Arcos (University of Queensland), Ashley Goreczny (Iowa State University), Alison Joubert (University of Queensland), Sungjin Kim (University of Hawai'i), Sid Mookerjee (University of British Columbia), Jacqueline Rifkin (University of Missouri-Kansas City), Zhen-gyu Shi (University of Hong Kong), Jennifer Sun (Columbia University), and Wanqing Zhang (City University of London), spanning four continents.

*Assumption: BMBW research can only be targeted at niche journals.*

One of our survey respondents framed this assumption thus: “The major journals typically emphasize theoretical advances, and BMBW work, by its very nature, tends to be more applied.” In the last year alone, many leading marketing journals have published special issues focused on better world outcomes, so this assumption is slowly being put to rest. Even so, this perception is widely prevalent, and the pace of change may need to pick up. Our survey respondents made such comments: “There are many barriers, including journals being less open to this type of research,” “greater appreciation for the topic [is needed] by editors/journals,” and “journals/reviewers are usually rather rigid in their thinking/reviewing style.”

*Recommendation:* We urge authors to retain their ambition to speak to the mainstream of marketing when addressing BMBW topics. To do so, we cannot rely only on reviewers' open-mindedness. It is best to anticipate and preempt the question that confronts any scholar who seeks to introduce new topics to the field: “Why does this topic belong in marketing?” Sell your ideas as marketing relevant (MacInnis et al. 2020).

We also urge editors and reviewers of leading journals to adopt a forward-looking stance to determine what *could* (or indeed should) belong in our field. We should be prepared to champion and shepherd some papers through the process even if it means overruling reviewers. The *JM* editors are open to these papers, and we hope this special issue sends a signal about our commitment to this area.

## An Invitation

The authors in our special issue made the leap across the chasm imposed by the aforementioned assumptions. This issue, to our delight, covers many important challenges facing the world, including sustainability and climate concerns, economic and social empowerment, health and well-being, and increasing prosocial giving as a way of mitigating some of these

challenges. Web Appendix 1 lists the papers by each topic and also catalogues the set of geographies covered, including developed markets such as the United States, Canada, and Germany and developing and emerging markets such as China, Brazil, Chile, India, Uganda, and Tanzania.

We invite you to make this leap as well—to look at pressing social issues and to ask some simple questions: Does this topic belong in marketing? How could you frame this topic as a mainstream marketing question? From these questions would emanate other questions: Why is the outcome important to marketing? Does marketing exacerbate the problem? Does marketing have the potential to provide a solution to or an explanation for the problem?

We asked marketing and consumer research scholars from across the field to reflect on these questions in sessions that we hosted at AMA and ACR conferences as part of the call for papers for the special issue.<sup>4</sup> They generated many interesting perspective and angles to connect better marketing to a better world, and we urge you to take inspiration from their ideas as well as the topics suggested in our call.<sup>5</sup> Our hope is that both will serve as inspiration long after this special issue.

## Proposed BMBW Initiatives for the Discipline

As a coda to this special issue, we are announcing a set of initiatives to help address the barriers and to support the marketing community in this area. Details and updates regarding these initiatives are available at the BMBW website at [www.bmbw.org](http://www.bmbw.org).

1. **BMBW Workshops, Conferences, and Competitions** to build a community of interdisciplinary scholars: We plan to conduct a monthly online workshop series that will be initially funded by the Wheeler Institute for Business and Development and *JM*. This series will feature speakers addressing BMBW topics within the marketing discipline. This team of editors will do the initial outreach for the series. To help develop the field, preference will be given to research that is in development and could benefit from input from other scholars. We also see an opportunity for a field-wide annual conference on BMBW that could build more community and foster the interdisciplinary bonds that will likely unlock the best solutions to better world problems. We will host a competition that will encourage cross-disciplinary submissions of research proposals that address challenging BMBW topics. We envision the possibility of a pan-marketing award for the top BMBW paper.
2. **BMBW Training** to impart knowledge and skills: Our doctoral training as well as socialization into research in

marketing too often ignores BMBW and does not offer relevant knowledge and skills to new members of the profession or to those seeking to make the transition to work on BMBW topics. To address this barrier, we commit to launching a research proseminar covering BMBW topics in 2021. The proseminar will pool expertise from the global community of scholars and will be open to all scholars interested in learning about topics, tools, and methods that can help illuminate the more complex research problems posed by a BMBW focus.

3. **BMBW Data Initiative** to provide a BMBW data repository: To address the limited availability of data, we will initiate a data collation exercise that draws researchers' attention to the possibilities for empirical research using new and existing data sets. We will work with the creators of these data sets to offer input and training on how to use them effectively to study BMBW topics. The BMBW website ([bmbw.org](http://bmbw.org)) will include a repository of these data sets and links to existing data sets. The training in item 2 will also address how these data sets can be leveraged to study BMBW.

## Conclusion: A Call to the Marketing Discipline

The winds of change in science, regulation, demographics, and the physical environment are creating new opportunities for marketing to make an impact on the world at large. New technologies are connecting ideas, resources, individuals, firms, societies, and markets in unprecedented ways. Those who harness these changes can shape aspirations, identities, and notions of right and wrong. Thanks in part to the activities of those who have already done so, in many ways the world has never been more prosperous, safe, educated, or equal (see Maddison 2001; Rosling, Rosling, and Rönnlund 2018). Yet the world has no shortage of challenges to address. The marketing discipline has no shortage of talent with which to tackle these challenges and these opportunities.

If we cannot transcend our own scholarly tribes and explore beyond the familiar, then it will be a failure of ambition on our part. If we cannot demonstrate to the next generation of scholars that better world outcomes are central to our field, then it would be our failure to inspire. If we cannot marshal the power of ideas and facts to speak with the powerless and to speak truth to power, it would not just be a failure of imagination. It would be a tragedy and a dereliction of our duty as scholars.

We can do more. We can do better. Let's work together to develop better marketing for a better world.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ama.org/rethinking-marketing-scholarship-from-a-better-marketing-for-a-better-world-perspective/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ama.org/2018/09/12/better-marketing-for-a-better-world-special-issue-journal-of-marketing/>.

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