

Marketing Thinking and Doing

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The history of marketing reveals an uneasy relationship between marketers and their academic counterparts. At best, they support one another's endeavors and may even partner to develop ideas and technologies. At worst, they ignore one another and may even view their counterpart with some disdain. While the latter is not useful, this 100-year old ambivalence in marketing is in some ways quite natural and its foundational quality quite old. Aristotle, for example, distinguished thinking (theoria) from doing (praxis).

We think there is a strong case to be made for stronger interactions between the two for the betterment of marketing. Consider weaving as an analogy. Individual fibers have value separately; when combined, they can produce useful materials or beautiful tapestries. To apply the analogy to marketing, academics and practitioners operate in distinct worlds with their own styles and requirements. The result for each can be a limited view of marketing—one focused on the threads relevant to their worlds. However, when each weaves at least some of the other's thinking and doing with their own, the resulting fabric is likely to be more valuable to the field and to the world at large.

Why write about the opportunity for a thinking-doing weave to introduce the Special Issue on "From Marketing Priorities to Research Agendas"? The reason lies in our purpose, which is to publish a set of articles that offers insights regarding how the Marketing Science Institute's (MSI's) priorities—determined every two years by polling corporate members—might be understood and advanced from an academic perspective. To that end, MSI created the MSI Scholars program in 2018 for mid-career scholars interested in translational research and invited them to participate in this challenge. Our purpose was to support these scholars on their quest and to invite practitioners and academic perspectives to challenge and complement their work.

Observing the process of writing and reviewing the articles and commentaries over the past few years has shown us it is much harder than it should be to fit together two things that should go hand in glove. Reflecting on these experiences and our roles in the field more broadly, we observed challenges, inspiration, and important lessons that we want to record in this editorial.

On an optimistic note, we must insist that academics and practitioners of marketing are stronger together. This is why we selected weaving, which brings together different fibers into a masterful whole, as an analogy. We also believe, to quote Maya Angelou (1991, p. 5), that "we are more alike . . . than we are unlike." In fact, many marketing practitioners act like academics, using the marketplace as their laboratory, while many scholars know how to take a practitioner's perspective and seek to improve marketing practice. Many academics have moved their research activities into the field, and many practitioners have brought more rigor and scholarship into their organizations. The process of creating a better weave is already underway.

Although we believe that the two roles should mainly stay distinct, we focus on how the weave we envision offers important academic and practitioner¹ benefits. We then consider strategies for fostering these more productive interactions across the field.

Why Weave?

Academic Benefits

Better ideas. Academics need footholds to move knowledge forward. When these footholds are sourced from the literature, the ideas are guaranteed to reflect other people's thinking and to be several years old. Observing marketing and consumer behavior in the marketplace, in contrast, increases the chance

¹We focus this editorial on "practitioners" within marketing organizations. However, our points also apply to marketing practitioners engaged in questions related to public policy and to other societal stakeholders engaged in marketing, even as critics.

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that academics will be exposed to more novel questions and puzzles. As an example, in response to Hamilton et al.'s (2021) discussion of the social journey, Pamela Forbus (2021), chief marketing officer of Pernod Ricard, identifies the concept of "social toxicity" as a menacing spillover of that journey that occurs when others pollute the environment with hate speech. Gordon et al. (2021) document challenges experienced by marketers in measuring and creating value from digital advertising as a springboard for offering research directions.²

Better data. Stronger engagement with marketing exposes scholars to new sources of data and facilitates the trust required to enable its exchange. The revolution in choice modeling inspired by scanner data and the surge in recent research on digital media related to social influence and advertising exemplify this opportunity. An added benefit is that new data often enable better identification of empirical phenomena and the ability to rule out alternative explanations.

New tools. Practitioners, especially in digital technology-based enterprises, are breaking new ground in developing data science techniques that diffuse into academia (Porter 2021). For example, many recent online advertising insights summarized in Johnson (2020), such as efficient measurement design when user and algorithms affect selection into treatment, had their genesis at digital advertising enterprises.

More effective teaching. Observing effective and ineffective marketing actions allows academics to draw important lessons. They may also encounter instances of thought leadership, such as the conception of customer transformation offered by Jason Wild (2021), senior vice president of Innovation at Salesforce—a view that could be melded with market orientation research to guide teaching about large-scale digital transformation.

Practitioner Benefits

New lenses. Given demands on time and attention and the need to grow their organizations, marketers may be hard-pressed to consider multiple perspectives to view a problem. Yet different lenses can provide different perspectives, as is evident in the academic articles and commentaries. Hamilton et al. (2021) identify social forces acting on the customer journey, which Grewal and Sridhar (2021) further dissect into social network structures and dynamics in business-to-business markets. In addition, in response to Cui et al.'s (2021) informational view of omnichannel marketing, John and Scheer (2021) and Ailawadi (2021) add important complementary governance and manufacturer perspectives that identify novel problems and solutions important to marketers. Marketers with decisions to

make may benefit from trying on these different lenses to assess where the greatest insights lie.

Across-industry knowledge. By necessity, marketers making decisions deal with concrete variables (e.g., price, channel) and operate within a particular industry context. These features may limit their ability to see the more powerful abstractions associated with what they have learned that could apply to other parts of their business, other marketing instruments, or in other companies they may lead over time. Academic marketing knowledge, in contrast, is built across industries and can serve these needs.

Going a mile deep. The need for a rapid-fire stream of marketing decisions means marketers are often forced to be a mile wide and an inch deep in their marketing knowledge base. Yet for most of these decisions—from changing consumer behavior to pricing, marketing capabilities, and online advertising—there is a deep knowledge base available to tap if one knows where to look. Academics, whose individual research often leads them to be a mile deep and an inch wide, can help identify and translate this knowledge.

New tools. Academics historically have been the source of many tools used in industry, such as conjoint analysis, marketing mix modeling, and, more recently, attribution modeling. Cui et al. (2021) extend our understanding of how to improve the last item, which should increase return on marketing investment. Du et al. (2021) draw a connection to the customer-based valuation models advanced by McCarthy, Fader, and Hardie (2017) by offering insight into managing new sources of data for customer acquisition, growth, and retention. For example, Du et al.'s (2021) insights about incorporating social network data into customer acquisition, using unstructured data, and harnessing causal data for proactive retention offer advances that we expect will impact practice in meaningful ways.

Benefit of a cold eye. In the swirl of day-to-day operations, it is easy for managers to be swept into fads and new technologies. The detached stance of an academic with no stake in the game and nothing to sell can offer trusted insights. As examples from the Special Issue, Kozinets and Gretzel (2021) sound a set of warnings to marketers about how artificial intelligence (AI) may undermine their distinctive contributions and skills, and Kalaiganam et al. (2021) caution that excessive shifts in pursuit of agility may threaten brand equity and partnerships.

Making Weaving Work

While the payoffs from working together may be compelling in principle, practitioners and academics often do not work together smoothly in practice. While editing this Special Issue, we saw practitioner commentators chafe at academic abstraction and academics reluctant to translate elegant theorizing into marketing guidelines. More generally, time constraints and the costs of outreach keep each in their own world. Considering

²We might add that empirical work can also benefit from starting in the marketplace and not in the lab or with archival data. Starting with interviews, a quick field experiment, or survey can be informative for getting the lay of the land.

these hurdles, we suggest ways to broker these interactions. We start by offering recommendations that apply to both practitioners and academics and then offer suggestions specific to each group. We finish with broader ideas for the entire field of marketing. Across these areas, we seek to be as provocative and helpful as possible to move the field more toward the thinking–doing weave.

What Both Can Do?

Find common problems. A shared focus on marketing problems—the marketing phenomenon—can help overcome many natural differences between academics and practitioners. For example, Morewedge et al. (2021) raise the problem that digital offerings tend to weaken consumers’ sense of psychological ownership. In response, Jim Griffin (2021), a digital music consultant, suggests a problem of interest to both music marketers and scholars that arises when a fan with a sense of psychological ownership behaves in a way that is at odds with the law (e.g., shares digital offerings that they do not own). Likewise, Scott Lieberman (2021), a management consultant at KPMG, points to the shared problem of designing human experiences that merge digital with physical elements.

Share a workbench. Our field has a limited history of academics and practitioners working on research together. This Special Issue involves two such commentary teams. In both, we observed the practitioners pointing to actions they have found useful and the academics conceptualizing them in ways that surfaced their broader meanings and implications for the field. For example, Nick Hughes’ work at M-PESA and M-KOPA uncovered novel marketing agility mechanisms (Hughes and Chandy 2021). Likewise, Bob Lurie’s experience working on managing insights at Eastman Chemical surfaced a set of content factors (data, decisions, and decision makers) and post–data capture process steps critical to converting data to growth (Morgan and Lurie 2021).

Celebrate different types of theory. Academics and practitioners each have their own brand of theory. Practitioners tend to use informal if-then ideas that explicitly or implicitly drive actions. Academics use formal predictions and mathematical relationships. These different approaches can make interactions challenging. In fact, both have value. Academics often turn to practitioners in nascent areas to unearth their theories (*in-use*), as Kalaighnam et al. (2021) do in their examination of marketing agility. The authors then bring their own theory lens to identify boundary conditions when agile marketing actions may harm companies. Ann Lewnes (2021), the chief marketing officer of Adobe, in turn, challenges the authors with unique observations based on her experiences. And so the plaiting goes.

What Can Academics Do?

Get out into the field. Steve Blank and Bob Dorf (2020) tell managers to “get out of the building” to see if their business

plans are market-ready. We think this admonition applies to scholars, too. Wading about in the studied milieu to observe firsthand what is happening sparks imagination. Once out, academics should note problems, inconsistencies, and even contradictions. Can these observations be explained by existing theories? If not, what new ideas, theories, constructs, and data are needed to offer insight? These excursions can be informal, such as sharing a conversation on a flight, or they can be more formal, such as connecting with alumni to learn about problems or attending practitioner or MSI conferences to get exposure. We are encouraged by our observations that more scholars are forging field connections.

Build a classroom lab. Many academics teach executive MBA students or MBA students who have recently left jobs. These practitioners offer a gateway experience for faculty members to begin weaving. Ask them to discuss their problems and ideas; try your ideas out on them, and look for the challenges and fruitful extensions.

Translate marketing reality into ideas. The MSI Scholar teams were tasked with developing novel research ideas about the MSI priorities—which are concrete problems facing marketers. This translation process is not easy; it requires knowledge of various concepts and theories *and* marketers’ problems. More important, it requires moving between the two worlds to try out different ideas and explanations to determine whether they offer insight into the marketing problem. Puntoni et al. (2021), for example, offer sociological and psychological theories to highlight how AI shapes the customer experience. Donath (2021), an ethics commentator, offers a provocative linguistic lens.

Create value beyond the paper. Engagement can result from informal activities, such as sharing research papers or having conversations on problems of interest, or formal activities, such as data sharing and running studies together. In any case, it is important for academics to think about how they can add value. If what you are doing will help your practitioner contact enhance her reputation in the organization, motivations to participate are strengthened. It is equally important to protect competitive secrets and to deliver value even as papers are working their way through the review process. This might involve, for example, sharing findings and ideas with the partner organization throughout the research process—not just at the end of it.

Engage in healthy confrontation. Getting close to practitioners does not mean accepting that they have accurately captured the problems or are even working on the right problems. As Varian (2016, p. 82) notes, “You have to be careful not to believe everything you hear—people in business usually know a set of rules that work well for running their own business, but they often have no idea of where these rules come from or why they work.” An example of this type of healthy confrontation can be found in the marketing challenges leveled in several articles dealing with consumer privacy (see Cui et al. 2021; Gordon

et al. 2021; Puntoni et al. 2021). At the same time, academics should allow their ideas and results to be challenged by practitioners. Cukier (2021), from *The Economist*, for example, challenges Puntoni et al.'s (2021) view that AI harms the customer experience by suggesting their examples are extreme and by pointing to AI efficiency gains that customers clearly value.

Embrace research diversity. The author teams reflect people from across the marketing discipline—often with very different types of training. It was therefore important for members to translate their approaches to one another even as they moved from the marketers' priorities to future research. In addition, given the scope of MSI's priorities, several teams picked up additional members outside of the MSI Scholars to fill knowledge gaps. For example, Kalaignanam et al. (2021) added several scholars who brought an organizational vantage point to work with two psychologically oriented consumer researchers. Weaving requires not only such unique content experts, but also translators who can move questions and ideas between worlds.

Make marketing your center of gravity. Marketing is enriched greatly by core disciplines, such as economics and psychology, because they bring new ways of thinking and unique tools to the study of marketing problems. However, we think maintaining focus on marketing phenomena will ensure payoffs for the field. We can practice this balance by taking ideas and tools from the core disciplines and assessing how they apply and might be extended in marketing contexts.

Decode and disseminate. Published academic papers that are not translated for practice are like the proverbial tree falling in the woods. Many outlets can help translation, including practitioner conferences, professional journals, letters to the editor, book writing, and case writing; many academics are fortunate to have the support of professional staff members who facilitate this translation process. For those less fortunate, we encourage business schools to make this investment. The strategy pays off for academics because exposure improves collaboration opportunities, which, in turn, may lead to better data and research ideas. Journals have a role to play here, and the *Journal of Marketing* has invested in translating our papers for practitioners and for the classroom (Moorman et al. 2018).

Steward the future. We asked the author teams to develop research agendas on the MSI priorities. This required them to challenge the very research frameworks and ideas they had constructed with piercing questions and tentative answers. These strong ideas can help propel the field forward to benefit both academics and practitioners. Our teaching also helps steward the future of practice by preparing future marketing leaders with ways of thinking and skills that can lead to better marketing.

What Can Practitioners Do?

Identify academic experts and invite them in. It is not difficult to find academic experts on topics that keep practitioners up at night. Host an event on such a topic and invite these experts to a roundtable for discussion and debate. Some firms already invite academics to attend industry conferences or to participate in advisory boards. For example, the Media Rating Council could be further enriched by including advertising experts from the academy.

Start with small steps. Read the academic expert's papers and invite him to share ideas. Most would consider it a great honor. Ask the expert to visit conference rooms and labs to observe a research study or an important decision that is unfolding. Academics tend to be curious, and many would find such a visit interesting. Embedding a PhD student, whose stipend is typically covered by a university, can go a long way toward developing tighter integrations between marketers and academics—and it is free. As the relationship improves, join a university marketing research center that brings companies together to discuss problems and share solutions. It is an easy way to gain access to academic knowledge and to learn from other industries.

Share your data and narratives. Scholars are eager for the right kind of data, typically cause-and-effect data and before-and-after data, along with the right to publish a suitably anonymized version. If offered such data, academics will analyze it and share insights. Further, we encourage practitioners to write up the marketing adventures of day-to-day business life and share them with scholars to inspire new research programs.

Come to our classrooms. Just as academics should consider getting out into the field, marketers should get out among academics. Business schools are often eager to let students hear the voice of practice, whether through a lecture, a live case, or a debate with an ostensible competitor or supplier. At best, classrooms can be low-risk labs to sift good ideas from bad with real-time feedback. Short visits to relevant PhD seminars—even for an hour to introduce or debate a challenging problem—may be an equally powerful venue for sharing your ideas with scholars of the future.

Probe thought limits. Impactful ideas in management practice have boundary conditions. Ask an academic for a point of view on the limits to your idea's applicability. While they might not be as able to address the contextual limitations as well as work colleagues, they often can bring in the lens of other contexts and a broad view of the literature to identify possible limits that might otherwise be hidden from your view. Understanding these boundary conditions is useful to scale knowledge.

Identify your theory. Two final points about the theories-in-use we mentioned earlier. When wrong, theories can lead to problems because marketers may not even recognize they hold assumptions that are driving them in unproductive directions.

However, when a theory adds value, it would be helpful to make it explicit, codify it, and share it more broadly in the organization. Academics have strong skills in unearthing these theories-in-use and could help marketers see the “bones” of beliefs that are often hidden from plain sight (Zeithaml et al. 2020).

The Marketing Discipline

Inspire. Pointing to ignorance can be galvanizing. Zaltman (1991) describes this as “usable ignorance” because it focuses attention and effort. MSI’s priority process is one such mechanism. We encourage the field’s associations and institutes to develop even stronger ways to focus attention on its most important problems. Consider, as a model product, the paper and commentaries produced by MSI’s priority on the “evolving landscape of MarTech and advertising”: Gordon et al. (2021) examine four types of inefficiencies challenging marketing practice on this topic. Marc Pritchard (2021), chief brand officer at Procter & Gamble, issues a rallying cry by noting that “half my advertising is being wasted” and offers possible solutions on measurement, fraud, transparency, and harmful content. Likewise, Jonathan Porter (2021), a director with the Competition and Markets Authority in the United Kingdom, adds to these concerns by considering why measurement matters for effective competition in digital advertising markets.

Connect. Journals and marketing associations have a role to play in hosting collaboration opportunities, whether through special issues or hosting discussions and conferences. This is MSI’s *raison d’être*, and its events have fostered strong engagement over the years. The *Journal of Marketing* hosted an event at the Summer AMA conference to celebrate the 2020 *JM*/Sheth Foundation award to “The Chief Marketing Officer Matters.” The authors presented their findings and then the CEO of Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance, India; the Global CMO of SAP; and the CMO of Chief Outsiders talked about when and how CMOs make an impact. The outcome was a much richer view of this question (see AMA 2020 for video coverage).

Reward. Improve the incentives for collaborations. In our view, universities should not devalue applied research. The relevant question is “Does it change thinking in the field?” If so, we believe it should be rewarded. Universities can also sponsor competitions for data, such as Wharton’s Customer Analytics activities, which bring marketing data to academics. Associations can sponsor prizes to encourage collaborations and journals can reward authors who contribute to practice with awards, such as the Gary L. Lilien ISMS-MSI Practice Prize at INFORMS. We think there is room for a dissertation award built on this premise. Companies can set up contests to involve academics or spark joint academic–practitioner work.

Conclusion

This editorial has argued for a better weave between marketing practice and scholarship. Our goal is simple: to improve

marketing, its underlying knowledge, its practice, and its impact on the world through the many ways we have detailed in this editorial. Of course, not everyone will agree with us. An argument might even be made for a looser weave. Indeed, in the 1960s reports from the Ford and Carnegie Foundations made just such an argument and set business schools down a path separating scholarship from practice that was crucial to producing the success business schools now enjoy. We are emphatically not interested in a return to the pre-1960s era when the weave was over-tight and business schools favored teaching institutional detail over theory. We are also not advocating that everyone be a weaver. There is a place in business schools for people who like to integrate thinking and doing as well as for people who are not so inclined. There is a place in companies for both types of people, too. But from our experience editing this Special Issue, we have concluded that for those who want to weave, there are benefits to doing so, and the ideas we have detailed in this editorial should help. In the end, as you learn the threads your counterparts handle, your understanding of marketing will be more complete and your work helping our profession—both in the quality of its ideas and its ability to create value in organizations and in the world—will be strengthened.

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