Concerns about the slow progress of theory development in marketing have existed over a significant number of years (Alderson and Cox, 1948; Bartels, 1976; Halbert, 1965). The perceived lack of theoretical discourse has prompted several AMA Educators conferences and special issues in high-profile journals in an attempt to generate more interest (Bush and Hunt, 1982; Hunt, 1983; Lamb and Dunne, 1980). At the end of the millennium a more theoretically driven marketing was identified as an important area for future development in special issues of the Journal of Marketing (Day and Montgomery, 1999), Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (Malhotra, 1999) and Psychology and Marketing (Taylor, 1999), amongst others. Alongside academics that favour a more theoretical focus per se, are those that advocate a more critical theoretical discourse of various persuasions (Brownlie et al., 1999; Burton, 2001; Dholakia, Fuat Firat and Bagozzi, 1980; Gronroos, 1994; Gummesson, 2001; Ozanne and Murray, 1991, 1995).

Of course, there will be academics within the discipline that are willing to disregard the growing evidence of a lack of theoretical orientation. They point to the extensive range of subjects and theories from which marketing already draws citing economics, psychology, sociology and cultural studies as examples. A rather different interpretation is that if marketing academics believe that by extensively theory borrowing they are creating a theory-driven discipline, they are deluding themselves. Theory-borrowing alone is not the issue. How borrowed theory is transformed and applied in a marketing context and thereafter perceived as a valuable resource by providing new insights and theory is a crucial measure. What the impact indicators inform marketing academics is that they cite from many other disciplines, but far less frequently does the reverse occur (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003). This evidence demonstrates that academics in other disciplines perceive marketing theory and marketing academics as having little to offer, theoretically or otherwise.

A strategy often deployed by marketing academics to defend their position at the bottom of the theory hierarchy of business school disciplines, is to play the ‘stakeholder card’. The argument goes something like this. Marketing is an applied discipline, it has many stakeholders, of which practitioners are one of the principal constituents. The main function of marketing academics is therefore to provide useful knowledge for business, not develop theory that is some distance removed from the day-to-day realities of marketing practitioners. Academics writing for academics is indicative of Mode 1 research, and is out of date. Marketing is therefore one of the
more enlightened business school disciplines at the forefront of Mode 2 and 3 research (Starkey and Madan, 2001).

Reasonable as they might seem, the stakeholder arguments with respect to practitioner-oriented research do not hold up under scrutiny. There is no self-evident relationship between lack of theory in a discipline and the ability to undertake research/consultancy for industry in marketing or elsewhere (Grey, 2001). There is mounting evidence, and there has been for some time, that marketing knowledge in its current form is not particularly valued by business. It has long been recognized that graduates of any discipline are recruited to marketing positions and the acquisition of professional examinations is not a prerequisite for a senior marketing appointment (Walker and Child, 1979). There is seemingly little relationship between marketing education and company performance (Hunt, 1995), and few marketing directors are on the boards of large companies in the USA and UK (Doyle, 2000). The perceived need for marketing knowledge in business has not been reflected in a higher level of status awarded to marketing practitioners or academics (Willmott, 1999). A related concern is that marketing academics' perceptions of what marketing knowledge is, are some distance removed from the realities of everyday practices of marketing managers. Marketing texts are largely normative in nature, specifying in prescriptive terms what needs to be accomplished (what to do), but rarely documenting how marketers actually conduct their business in practice (Brownlie and Saren, 1997; Gummesson, 2002). Some of the most vocal criticisms about the status of academic marketing knowledge come from academics involved in designing marketing management support systems, who recognize the considerable gulf between academic and practitioner marketing knowledge (Wierenga, 2002).

Undoubtedly, the lack of theory generation in marketing raises some uncomfortable issues for marketing academics. One is that marketing academics are intellectually incapable of generating theory (Fine and Leopold, 1993). This is an extension of Piercy’s (1999) argument that academics moving into marketing from other disciplines are those who can not make the grade in their source discipline. In this sense marketing becomes a repository of intellectually inferior members, since many academics in the field have backgrounds other than marketing. This is indeed a hard criticism and undermines some of the very good theoretical and critical theoretical work of marketing scholars, especially in top-tier marketing journals such as the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

A rather different approach would be to find answers in the way marketing as a discipline and discourse are socially and politically constructed (Brownlie and Saren, 1996). Lazer (1967) provides a starting point by suggesting that the lack of theorists and lack of theory courses in academic institutions are the main reasons why theory has been slow to develop in marketing (Capella, Robin and Maronick 1986; Lazer, 1967). While this is an important starting point, it is a rather simplistic assessment of what is a rather more complex issue. The paper builds on Lazer’s analysis and makes a contribution to existing knowledge by considering additional factors, including the lack of a widely agreed upon marketing syllabus, the lack of an extensive range of marketing theory texts, business school priorities, the publication-driven nature of marketing and misplaced perceptions of practitioner-oriented research. The paper begins with a discussion about the lack of marketing theorists.

### Lack of theorists

Bartel’s (1988) view that the lack of theory in marketing can be attributed to a lack of theorists would appear as well-founded today as it was nearly 20 years ago. Few marketing academics would readily identify themselves as marketing theorists judging by their teaching preferences and the paucity of theory-focused articles in major journals (Baker and Erdogan, 2000). Although marketing academics are a very eclectic bunch in terms of their backgrounds and professional orientation (Brownlie, 1997), the majority of marketing academics more closely identify themselves with marketing practice and applied practitioner-oriented research, rather than theory development. Further evidence for this is provided by the RAE submissions of marketing academics that were highly concentrated in the *Journal of Marketing Management* and the *European Journal of Marketing* (Easton and Easton, 2003). Both of these journals are
classified as having an overwhelming focus on marketing applications (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003).

It is not being suggested here that there is a firm dichotomy between academics that are interested in theory and others that favour practical application, but to suggest that there are differences in the relative importance of theory and theory development in their work. In this respect marketing is different from other social sciences where to be identified as a theorist is a high status, high profile position, since theorists play a pivotal role in creatively advancing disciplines.

To fully appreciate the development of the discipline requires a historical perspective. This presents some difficulties for marketing academics since marketing history is one of the least developed specialisms and competing views of its development are limited (Holden and Holden, 1998; Jones and Monieson, 1990). The most authoritative account is provided by Bartels (1983), who argues that the lack of theorists in marketing can be traced back to the 1960s and is the outcome the relative influence of organized groups of US practitioners and academics that today comprise the American Marketing Association. He notes that the earliest teachers of marketing in the USA were economists, and their professional identification was first established in 1915 as the National Association of Teachers of Advertising (NATA). These academics were primarily responsible for developing the original ‘principles of marketing’, a body of thought not primarily intended for application to marketing management problems (Bartels, 1983, p. 33). The focus was on theory and theory generation, particularly with respect to advertising. With the broadening of activities introduced under the auspices of marketing, other academics wished to join the Association and as a result NATA and the National Association of Marketing Teachers was formed in 1933. Simultaneously, and independently of academic organizations, practitioner groups were establishing themselves, and in 1930 they formed the American Marketing Society. In 1937, the practitioners merged with the teachers’ group to become the American Marketing Association.

The merging of the two groups formed the basis of a closer working relationship between academia and industry, although conflicts arose due to their different orientations. Initially academic interests prevailed, but as the influence of practitioners increased the emphasis was ‘shifted from theoretical to empirical research, from basic to applied thought development, and from educational to occupational concerns’ (Bartels, 1983, p. 33). One of the consequences was that vocationalism was introduced into academic marketing programmes. In undergraduate programmes, marketing management was introduced as an introductory course rather than something more broadly based. At graduate level, courses in historical perspectives in the development of marketing and marketing thought were largely eliminated by the end of the 1950s and early 1960s.

The shift to a more applied, practical approach to the teaching of marketing in the USA, coincided with the expansion of British business schools in the mid-1960s (Midgley, 1970). The American model was adopted in its entirety without a marketing theory specialism, or theoretical orientation (Spillard, 1967). The wholesale adoption of the US business education model was not unique to marketing, nor was it specific to the UK. The transfer of US technical and managerial know-how was adopted in many areas of Western Europe and Japan in the post-War period. However, in Britain during the 1960s there was already recognition that the US one-size-fits-all model of marketing knowledge was not entirely appropriate. A decisive factor in the publication of Britain’s first marketing journal, the British Journal of Marketing in 1967, was to counteract the highly North-American nature of marketing education imported into Britain, whether in the form of textbooks or research methods (Willis, 1967). As a result of the temporal-spatial relationship of marketing knowledge in the USA and the UK during the 1960s, many of Britain’s ‘mature’ professors of marketing have not been actively involved in teaching a theory specialism, nor teaching from a theoretical perspective, whereas this is not true of the USA.

One way to ensure a supply of theorists in the future, is to give theory a higher profile in the training programmes of doctoral students who will comprise the next generation of marketing academics and practitioners. As Venkatesh (1985, p. 63) argues, ‘theory development requires a kind of training which is not available to most academic marketers who come out of traditional
marketing departments, where the emphasis is on empirical research, data analysis, and quantitative modelling. These areas offer limited potential for theory generation. A similar point is made by Zaltman, LeMasters and Heffring (1982, p. 5) who argue that ‘creating theory is not the same as understanding, modelling, and testing theory. Little guidance is available to the marketing student about creating theories’.

During the mid-1980s, an AMA-commissioned report on the state of research training in the USA, found considerable variation in the content and quality of doctoral programmes, with little focus on theory or theory development (Tybout, 1986). As a result, there was reluctance to describe students as ‘highly qualified’ marketing theorists at the end of the process (Capella, Robin and Maronick, 1986). In the UK, the current Economic and Social Research Council Training Guidelines make no mention of theory or theory generation in marketing, although it is addressed as an important issue in other management specialisms (Burton, 2003; ESRC, 2002). The lack of support to theory development in doctoral programmes is not desirable, as Levy (2002, p. 303) acknowledges ‘To deny the need for this support is a foolish “know-nothing” anti-intellectual attitude that does not understand the role and necessity of basic research whose practical value may not be immediately apparent’. It is important that theory is actively written into formal doctoral training guidelines, since the emphasis given to particular elements can be a highly subjective process. Trocchia and Berkowitz (1999) have demonstrated the ways in which supervisors socialize research students according to their particular set of beliefs. Allowing supervisors to control research-training content is likely to reinforce the status quo.

Lack of theory courses

Given the lack of theorists in marketing, it is not surprising that marketing theory has not emerged as a core specialism in marketing discourse. In this respect, marketing is fundamentally different from the social sciences from which it evolved and from other business school disciplines including organizational studies where a theory specialism is deeply embedded in disciplinary discourse. Students studying these disciplines will be exposed to the theoretical underpinnings of their chosen subject in the first term of their undergraduate studies, with an advanced version usually incorporated into Masters degree programmes. While some marketing academics could have concerns about teaching marketing theory early on in the syllabus, a broadly based theory course would provide a useful foundation for specialist modules taught later on.

There are considerable cross-national variations in the extent to which a marketing theory specialism is incorporated into marketing syllabi at undergraduate and postgraduate level in the Pacific Rim, the USA and Europe. There are also differences in the precise content of courses and the importance of theory within different institutional contexts (Baker and Erdogan, 2000; Hetzel, 2000; Howard and Ryans, 1993; Howard et al., 1991; Polonsky and Mankelow, 2000; Schlegelmilch, 2000). Capella, Robin and Maronick’s (1986) analysis of marketing theory courses over twenty years in the USA, found there was a decline in the percentage of institutions offering theory courses at masters level and an increase at doctoral level. Over the same period there was also an observable change in the orientation of theory courses. Those of a descriptive and historical nature declined, while those that focused on the nature of theory based on the philosophy of science dramatically increased. In the USA there are wide divergences in the emphasis that marketing theory is given in business schools that are AACSB and non-AACSB accredited, and institutions provide differential rewards to theory generation (Martinez, Toyne and Menger, 2000).

In France, business schools belonging to the state university system have a strong research tradition and place a significant emphasis on theory development and the teaching of theory. On the other hand, private business schools usually belong to the chamber of commerce system, are largely staffed by former marketing managers whose training was in ‘the marketing field and not marketing theory’ (Hetzel, 2000, p. 699). Apart from the very highest echelons, private schools are practice oriented, and in the past research was not valued. To some extent these trends are changing as younger people with PhDs are being recruited to work in private schools, often promoting a culture clash with older academics in the same department.
The very segmented employment streams that are observable in France and the USA are not as evident in Britain; indeed one might argue that trends are moving in the opposite direction. The conversion of former polytechnics into universities is one example of this shift, blurring the line between the ‘traditional research focused institutions’ and those that are predominantly teaching institutions. However, perhaps a more relevant feature is the current employment market in Britain. As a result of rapidly expanding student numbers, highly qualified marketing academics are often difficult to attract and keep. Even in high status, research-led universities where one might have expected significant numbers of marketing theorists to be employed, and therefore marketing theory to be taught, they are largely absent. Another trend is to employ practitioners, or former practitioners in lecturing positions to cover shortfalls in teaching. Arguably these trends are not conducive to a heightened theoretical focus in teaching, indeed quite the reverse, with far more emphasis on practical application.

The lack of an emphasis on teaching theory courses needs to be acknowledged and dealt with, as such courses could act as a focus for change and stimulate more interest in theory and theory development, which has the potential to transform the discipline. According to this line of reasoning, a marketing theory course should be incorporated as a core course at first-year undergraduate level. The function of such provision would be to map the field of marketing, giving some context to marketing as an economic, social and political activity in its historical context. This foundation could be built upon in subsequent modules of a more applied nature.

A rather different position would be to oppose the incorporation of dedicated marketing theory courses on the grounds that marketing as an academic and practical activity is organized around marketing specialisms. According to this line of argument the way to integrate more marketing theory into the curriculum is to heighten the theoretical content within existing specialisms. It is already fairly widely acknowledged that the theoretical infrastructure within specialisms varies widely (Burton, 2001). Theory is probably the most advanced in the area of consumer behaviour, and researchers in that specialism have taken an active interest in documenting the theoretical development of the field (Belk, 1995), while in other areas, for example exporting, there has reportedly been little theoretical development over the last twenty years (Piercy, 2002). A more proactive approach to theory building within specialisms would require an audit of courses to determine where and how the level of theoretical content might be increased. The downside of this approach is that a very fragmented and compartmentalized approach to the teaching of theory is adopted, with few overriding theoretical perspectives that integrate specialisms together. In the long term, both approaches working in tandem are highly desirable.

Lack of a widely agreed-upon marketing theory syllabus

Another barrier to a heightened theoretical focus in marketing is the lack of a widely agreed-upon, standardized marketing theory syllabus. In many marketing specialisms, what is deemed to be appropriate content has evolved and been widely agreed upon within the marketing community over a significant number of years, drawing on journal articles, texts and possibly in conjunction with marketing practitioners. For example, the syllabus relating to marketing research, consumer behaviour and services marketing will vary little between institutions and academics. This is not the case for marketing theory (November, 2002).

One approach to the development of a marketing theory syllabus is set out in Table 1 and includes theories ‘of’ marketing, theories ‘in’ marketing, practitioner theories in use and critical approaches to marketing theory. Each of these elements will be discussed in the remainder of the section.

Theory definition

At the heart of the marketing theory debate is defining the criteria of a theory. Depending on how one defines the term ‘theory’, marketing could be either theory rich or theory impoverished. During the 1960s and 1970s, the criterion for defining a theory was given considerable attention by marketing academics. For example, drawing on the philosophy of the sciences literature, Hunt (1983) argued that marketing theories could only be legitimately designated as theories if they (1) comprise a systematically set of statements (2) consisted of law-like general-
izations, and (3) were empirically testable propositions. Other marketers have argued that marketing is essentially dealing with human endeavour and is essentially a social process. Marketing as a social process cannot be studied and measured by importing the criteria of theory from the sciences (Gummesson, 2002). According to this interpretation, Hunt’s criteria, and others like it, are inappropriate vehicles for theory construction in marketing.

Venkatesh (1985) argues that theories can be represented in a hierarchical structure (see Table 2). The highest form of theoretical representation closely conforms to the definition of theory in the natural sciences. He argues that theory in this form does not exist in marketing. The lowest forms are sets of empirical findings that are not supported by any theoretical explanation. Marketing research is largely concentrated at the lower levels of the theoretical hierarchy, and the inability to climb the ladder in any meaningful sense has led to a theory crisis in marketing.

Table 1. Marketing theory syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existence of marketing theory</td>
<td>Issue of boundaries and multidisciplinarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory definition</td>
<td>Different criteria for theory, existence in marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories ‘of’ marketing</td>
<td>Main contributions and contributors in the field, difficulties of the approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories ‘in’ marketing</td>
<td>Distinction between theory of and in marketing, importance of specialisms in generating theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical approaches to marketing theory</td>
<td>Definitions of critical theory in marketing, barriers to its implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner theories in use</td>
<td>Importance of theory to practitioners: metalanguage, management learning and extending terms of reference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. A hierarchical theoretical structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notions of theory</th>
<th>Situation in marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest form</td>
<td>None exists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory (natural science model)</td>
<td>Very few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carefully developed classificatory schemata</td>
<td>A small number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex models</td>
<td>A small number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex concepts leading to interesting findings</td>
<td>Quite a few and growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research questions of highest significance</td>
<td>A large number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad ideas about how marketing phenomena behave</td>
<td>A large number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations about empirical findings</td>
<td>A large number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest form</td>
<td>Relating empirical findings to other empirical findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theories ‘of’ marketing

There is some disagreement about where the emphasis in marketing theory development should be placed. Some marketing academics would argue for a general theory of marketing and the focus of theory development within the discipline should be directed towards this end (Hunt, 1983). Bagozzi’s (1975) general theory of marketing as exchange is one such example. Much of the valuable literature in this area has been written up as biographies (Brown, 2001, 2002).

Theories of marketing have an important place within the theoretical development of the discipline; however, to confine theoretical contributions to this area alone is perhaps too narrow a focus. It is a very specialized area of discourse and it is unlikely to capture the imagination of significant numbers of marketing academics. There have also been doubts about the utility of this approach to theory development from marketing practitioners who believe that grand theories of marketing are some distance removed from day-to-day marketing practice (Bird, 1996) and by marketing academics who regard it as a waste of time and effort (Prendergast and Berthon, 2000).

Theories ‘in’ marketing

Other academics would argue that the focus should be on generating theory ‘in’ marketing rather than ‘of’ marketing. This is a much wider,
and some might argue, inclusive position. For example, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) and the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) both originate in psychology but have formed the basis of a great deal of research in marketing over the years (for example see Davies Foxall and Pallister, 2002; Foxall, 1997). Another approach is a consideration of the ways in which theories in marketing have been generated. One contemporary example is that of the development of relationship marketing theory having its roots in services marketing, marketing channel management, business marketing and the interaction of networks, and direct and database marketing (Moller and Halinen, 2000).

The development of theory in marketing is a bottom-up rather than top-down approach to theory building. It is probably a more accessible approach to theory development for most academics, since theory can be generated through marketing specialisms in which most marketing academics feel comfortable working. For example, O’Driscoll and Murray (1998) argue that although there has been little movement towards a general theory of marketing in recent years, within individual marketing specialisms there has been a considerable amount of theory building.

**Practitioner theories in use**

The view that theory is of little relevance to marketing practitioners is simply incorrect, since they can and do actively use theories and concepts in their day-to-day activities (Cornelissen, 2002; Lusch, 1980). In the 1970s, practitioners were writing articles in marketing journals requesting a more conceptual menu and interdisciplinary approach to university marketing courses (Dillon-Malone, 1970). There was a recognition that good quality marketing theory should have positive, practical outcomes, whereas poor marketing theory is of little practical value (see also Gummesson, 2001, 2002). Considerable attention in marketing has been paid to the perceived gap between marketing theory and practice. Far less emphasis has focused on the importance of theory building to practitioners and the concept of theories in use. Zaltman, LeMasters and Heffring (1982) argue that practitioners should be concerned with building theory for three main reasons: the importance of developing metalanguage to enable managers to think more creatively about their own thinking and the thinking of others; the ability to learn efficiently in new situations; and as a way of extending their terms of reference.

**Critical approaches to marketing theory**

Another aspect of the theory debate in marketing is the emergence of critical theory as a distinctive approach to marketing knowledge. While the concept of critical theory is self-evident in some of the mature social sciences, e.g. sociology, its definition in marketing is not so clear cut. In its ‘pure’ form critical theory is a very distinctive tradition that has its roots in the Frankfurt School in the writings of Habermas (1971) and within marketing (Burton, 2001, 2002; Holt, 2002; Ozanne and Murray, 1991, 1995). At another level, critical theory can be conceptualized as an umbrella term to refer to theory in a critical tradition including philosophy in the case of critical realism (Easton, 2002), feminism, racism (Hirchman, 2001), and postmodernism (Brown, 1994, 1995; Cova, 1999; Firat et al., 1995). At another level, critical theory can be conceived as an approach that is opposition to mainstream marketing theory; for example, relationship marketing as a critique of the conventional marketing mix (Gronroos, 1994). A final approach would argue that the generation of theory implies critically evaluating the state of existing knowledge and building upon this to create new theoretical approaches.

Critical perspectives have not been widely embraced in marketing; it is largely a minority interest comprising different factions. The tradition of critical theory in marketing contrasts starkly with the experience in accounting where alternative critiques and theorizing have opened up an important space between ‘conventional’ accounting literature and practice, often despite opposition and sustained attacks from traditionalists (Gray, 2002). It is important that these different theoretical traditions are acknowledged, and incorporated into mainstream teaching even though they may not be welcome in all institutional contexts. As academics, we regularly state in course outlines that the objectives of courses include a critical evaluation of theory and practice. In reality, marketing academics must ask themselves whether they really do approach...
their teaching in this way (see also Walker et al., 1998). It is important that critical theory in marketing opens up new spaces, and is not just simply a means of reacting to old ones. Some headway has already been made with the establishment of new journals including the Journal of Macromarketing, Consumption, Markets, and Culture and Marketing Theory. A next step is to evaluate the contribution and impact this discourse is having on teaching and research in marketing. Emphasizing the importance of good quality, critical marketing theory could be perceived as a step towards the ‘deMcDonaldization’ (Ritzer, 2001, p. 20) of marketing in higher education.

A comprehensive theory course should contain all of these elements to provide students with a rich overview of the field.

Lack of appropriate marketing theory texts

Another inhibiting factor to the generation and teaching of marketing theory is the lack of appropriate teaching materials and a relative unwillingness to use theory texts from outside of marketing to facilitate the discussion (Capella, Robin and Maronick, 1986). Compared with other areas of marketing discourse, few marketing theory texts are available (November, 2002). It is difficult to envisage a situation where theory will develop and flourish within marketing without appropriate texts to facilitate the discussion. Herein lies another issue; the relatively little importance given to the writing of good quality texts in marketing. Brownlie and Saren (1995) argue that there is a stigma attached to textbook writing, particularly when products take the form of repackaging the ideas of the original authors. However, teaching texts or the ‘Big, Fat Books About Marketing’, as Brown (2001) would have them, do not necessarily have to take this form and research-led theory texts are evident in other social science and management disciplines.

Existing marketing theory texts can be divided into various categories, those that are broadly based and cover a substantial terrain at a fairly superficial level, and those that include discussions of theory per se and theory within specialisms (see Baker and Erdogan, 2000). A number of texts have also been published relating to marketing theory per se (Hunt, 1983; Sheth, Gardner and Garrett, 1988) and theory building in marketing (Zaltman, LeMasters and Heffring, 1982). Others specialize in particular aspects of theory development for example, postmodernism (Brown, 1995, 1997, 2001), alternative methodological approaches (Stern, 1995) and theoretical positions drawn from the wider social sciences (Foxall, 1997). There is a place for both broadly based and specialized texts, depending on the nature and level of the course and the expertise of students.

The marketing academy will have to decide for itself whether dedicated marketing theory texts are desirable and what types of texts are most appropriate to support this work. This decision will ultimately be reflected in authors’ predisposition to write such texts, the willingness of publishers to publish them and academics’ willingness to adopt them for use on their courses (Holbrook, 1995; Hunt, 2002).

Business school priorities

Despite the considerable debate about marketing theory (or the lack of it), the focus has tended to be on the content as opposed to the organizational context in which theory is generated. This is an important omission, since theory generation is essentially ‘stripped’ from the social, economic and political context of the higher education system in which it is generated. Barry, Chandler and Clark (2001, p. 87) argue that there have been considerable changes to systems of higher education in many advanced societies in recent years. The move to mass higher education has led some to argue that universities resemble assembly lines in factories. Increasing student numbers, targets, limited resources, quality audits, semesterization, research assessment exercises, league tables and pressures of new course development are all features of the contemporary academic landscape. The MacDonaldization of higher education has arguably led to undergraduate degrees becoming an ‘insufficient credential for anything of consequence (Hudson, 2001, p. 20) and the value of management education, particularly the MBA, has been questioned (Lataif, 1992; Linder and Smith, 1992).

Considerable competition from alternative suppliers has also emerged. In the USA, corpo-
rate universities are the fastest growing sector of higher education. There are approximately 1800 corporate universities in existence, and over the next decade they will outnumber traditional higher education establishments (Prince and Beaver, 2001). Further competition is emerging from the numerous coalitions (universities, publishers and communications providers) of on-line higher education suppliers (Goddard, 2001). Business education is high on the agenda of these organizations, and on-line course delivery is particularly suited to a traditional marketing course syllabi with its focus on applying existing theories and models (Ponzurick, France and Logar, 2000). Exploring theory and theoretical development is more suited to face-to-face delivery, since this gives more scope for interaction and discussion. Lastly, the relationship between professional marketing qualifications that have a practical orientation and university marketing modules have become blurred through the use of CIM exemptions (Burton, 2001). Given the considerable expense of a university education, studying for professional marketing examinations on a part-time basis that requires far less time and financial commitment could be perceived as a better route into a marketing career than an undergraduate degree.

Slaughter and Leslie’s (2001, p. 154) concept of ‘academic capitalism’ is instructive in understanding the relationship between the market place and the theoretical content of marketing in its focus on the market and market-like behaviours of universities and faculties. A key aspect of academic capitalism is for organizations to select an appropriate marketing mix in order to win competitive advantage. In order to do this, universities are responding to what customers want, rather than what they need (Barrett, 1997). Marketing courses including conversion courses and DBAs are often money-generating activities in their function of delivering what consumers want, or rather what they think they need, which is often practically focused provision that is not theory driven.

In their attempts to compete on a global basis, universities are delivering what consumers want. In marketing, this tends to be highly practical provision akin to training marketers. This strategy is having a negative effect on the teaching and development of theory in many institutional contexts (Holbrook, 1995). Short-term economic gain by providing low-level practical tuition that is rarely valued in the workplace if judged by the poor relationship between marketing education and company performance (Hunt, 2002), the fact that few marketing directors are on the boards of large companies (Doyle, 2000), and low levels of professional closure (Enright, 2000), is not an appropriate long-term strategy. Theory generation will provide innovative and exciting insights that marketers need to effectively function at the highest levels. Low-level, skills-based tuition has limited utility over the longer term; the skills and ability to creatively think about marketing problems will transcend this. Hence the mushrooming interest in managers’ cognitive competence (see Hodgkinson, 1997; Hodgkinson and Sparrow, 2002).

In the longer term the most successful departments will possibly be those that are creative, theory driven and have lots of new ideas and approaches to offer marketers that are outside their current frames of reference. If the observable trends in academic capitalism continue, it is highly likely that these creative marketing centres maybe outside of the large business schools, in management studies departments where the pressure to conform to the essentially US model of business education that is largely synonymous with marketing management practice is often not as great.

The publication-driven nature of marketing

The publication-driven nature of academia is a trend that is evident in a number of countries and is not unique to marketing (see Hetzel, 2000; Sinkovics and Schlegelmilch, 2000). The emphasis on published output as a measure of academic success has generated a raft of indicators including the ranking marketing of marketing journals (Hult, Neese and Bashaw, 1997), the contribution of scholars and marketing departments in major marketing journals (Bakir, Vitell and Rose, 2000), and the modelling of publication performance (Diamantopoulos, 1996).

Bartels (1983, p. 33) argues that the ‘publish or perish culture’ that has pervaded the process of obtaining tenure for many years in the USA, has had its part to play in marginalizing the role of theory in marketing. He notes that the shift towards a more practical orientation in marketing
has resulted in publications that place less emphasis on marketing theory and more on implications for practitioners. Promotion and tenure decisions are based on the conduct of such research and he notes that ‘motivation in scholarly work is for short-term rather than long-term career payoffs. And there is little concern for philosophy in marketing even among more mature academics’. Similar sentiments have been aired about short-termism as one consequence of the UK research assessment exercise in business and management (Cooper and Otley, 1998), so have the inevitable quality issues resulting from academics producing multiple marketing publications to meet RAE targets (Piercy, 2000; Saren, 2000), and its impact on the writing of theory papers in marketing (Brown, 1995). There is also a related concern that critical theory is not well received in highly ranked US journals, and this may be having the effect of suppressing this area of theory development. As Ardnt (1985, p. 19) indicates, ‘In marketing it appears that the cost of heresy is high. In our enlightened age the dissident marketing scientist is not burned at the stake. Instead he or she is rather more likely to suffer the slow burnout of never emerging from the journals revision purgatories’.

There can be little doubt that the system of tenure and RAES maybe a contributory factor in the lack of attention to theory in marketing for the reasons outlined above. However, it needs to be recognized that the highly empirical and applied focus in marketing existed prior to the system of tenure and RAES. It is also apparent that academics in other disciplines are under pressure to produce high-quality work, yet they do not have the same anti-intellectual, anti-theoretical image that many marketing academics tend to attract.

Some might argue that it is significant that over the last decade some of the most influential theoretical developments, in particular with respect to relationship marketing, had their roots in Scandinavia and to a lesser extent in Australiasia. Neither of these research environments are as publication-driven as either the USA or UK, nor do they operate a system of tenure. This observation maybe indicative of future trends. Some of the most important theoretical developments maybe generated in research environments where academics are able to spend time and are committed to developing and writing theory papers. An important research project is to explore the relationship between major theoretical advances and research cultures in which they are generated; this could include acknowledging the importance of national academic research culture.

**Misplaced perceptions of practitioner-oriented research**

The relationship between theory and practice in management research is a long-standing debate (Whitley, 1984, 1988) and discussions about Modes 1, 2 and 3 research are a recent addition to this dialogue (Huff and Huff, 2001; Starkey and Madan, 2001; Tranfield and Starkey, 1998). Much of the call to engage in practitioner-oriented research includes meeting the needs of stakeholders in more appropriate and efficient ways. The solutions are often couched in terms of creating bridges between academic institutions and business by mechanisms promoting appropriate and effective knowledge exchange and dissemination, creating forums and networks, and developing new journals. The debate about practitioner-oriented research has a long history in marketing; however, it was noticeable that none of the contributions in a recent special issue in the *British Journal of Management* (see Hodgkinson, 2001) were written from a marketing perspective.

Conflicts over the importance that should be given to practitioner-oriented research in marketing has been the subject of bitter debate and are neatly summarized by Holbrook (1995) in his characterization of marketing academics as either dogs or cats. The canine variety are more than happy to wag their tails and please their masters in industry by displaying plenty of tricks and obediently doing as they are told for the next research grant. The feline variety are much more independent, are more likely to please themselves and be more aloof. Dancing to the tune of practitioners is not high on their agenda. For Holbrook, the function of academics is to be independent from practitioners and produce good quality research that is theory driven. If the research output is of interest to practitioners, all well and good, but meeting the needs of practitioners should not be high on the agenda of marketing academics.

Piercy (1999, 2002) and others like him, on the other hand, bemoan the lack of practitioner-
oriented research in marketing and argue that business schools in general should have much closer working relationships with industry. However, when it comes to defining what the term practitioner-oriented research is, there is little of substance beyond avoiding ‘methodological madness’ and giving managerial implications as much coverage as research results. There is little space given to critically evaluating the discourse of practitioner-oriented research and the issue of relevance (Brownlie, 1997; Brownlie and Saren, 1997), or of the importance of theory in this endeavour.

A middle-range position is exemplified by Gummesson’s (2002) view that marketing academics need to generate a theory of marketing management. He argues that both academics and practising managers underrate the value of good theory. There is a need in marketing for basic research, whether generated deductively by posing questions from existing theory, or inductively to come up with answers to questions not yet asked. Meeting the demand for research that is immediately applicable to please industry stimulates short-term thinking, which, although it might be a necessity, it does not tackle the generic properties of marketing. Basic research takes time and its future yields are uncertain, but it has the power to generate long-term, dynamic change.

Advocates of practitioner-oriented research also need to recognize that practitioners are only one group of stakeholders in marketing (Denzin, 2001) as is the case in other areas of management (Grey, 1991). Marketing academics have no hesitation in exploring stakeholder orientation in companies (see Greenley and Foxall, 1996) but have been far more reluctant to critically reflect on the stakeholders of the marketing academy. Hunt’s (2002) discussion of marketing as a profession and on closing stakeholder gaps acknowledges the ‘problem of conceptualizing practitioners as the only stakeholders’, but his analysis of multiple stakeholders goes little further than the training of technically competent and socially responsible graduates, and the odd reference to policy makers. There is an urgent need to theorize who the stakeholders of marketing knowledge should be and on what basis groups are included and excluded, along with the relative importance of each. Bazerman (2001) criticizes consumer researchers and consumer research for failing to take the educational needs of consumers seriously. Although consumer researchers have developed some very powerful insights, these insights are likely to be of more benefit to marketers than consumers. In this respect consumer researchers have failed in their responsibility to provide journalists with information to pass on to readers. Other stakeholders include the government, regulators and consumer groups amongst others (Burton, 2003; Hollander, Keep and Dickinson, 1999).

A debate needs to take place in marketing with respect to what form practitioner-oriented and other forms of stakeholder research should take and the role of theory in this endeavour. Marketing theorists would argue that conceptualizing practitioner-oriented research as simply responding to the day-to-day needs of practitioners is a totally inappropriate role for marketing academics, and it could be detrimental to industry in the long-term. Fudging the issue by emphasizing diversity within the marketing academy (Wensley, 2002) is not the answer. There needs to be an open debate in marketing about the role of theory in practitioner-oriented research.

**Conclusion**

In 1967, Lazer proposed two main reasons why theory was slow to develop in marketing: the lack of theorists and the lack of theory courses in academic institutions. It would appear that relatively little progress has been made in the intervening quarter of a century. It has been argued that additional factors play a contributory role in explaining the lack of theoretical orientation and these need to be recognized and addressed before the situation is likely to improve. Incorporating a more theoretical focus is likely to combat the anti-intellectual image that has dogged marketing and marketing academics for a considerable period of time. A more theoretically driven discourse requires action at different levels: by individuals in terms of what they teach and their research agendas; at the level of the marketing community in the context of collectively agreeing on some definition of the content of a marketing theory syllabus, a consistent policy for the training of doctoral students, and opening up spaces for alternative discourse, and at the institutional level in relation to being able to control course content in the face of heightened importance given to academic capitalism. Unless each of these levels is simultaneously addressed, the prognosis...
for change is likely to be poor and marketing will remain the least-theorized business school specialism. This situation is not desirable, and academics within business schools outside of the discipline should support the few marketing academics that are attempting to facilitate change, since there is considerable opposition from within.

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