Co-authoring tomorrow: On how past marketing knowledge enlightens future marketing theory

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Abstract
Tomorrow’s marketing theory is best co-authored with its past, the history of marketing thought. The merits of this co-authoring are deeply rooted in the value this brings to marketing knowledge and the marketing discipline – conceptual, methodological, scientific and pedagogical value. The purpose of this contribution is to demonstrate the relationship between the history of marketing thought and the further development of marketing theory.

Keywords
history of marketing thought, marketing knowledge, marketing philosophy, marketing theory

Conceptually
A historical perspective imparts an ‘intellectual heritage and sense of origin’ (Jones and Shaw, 2002: 40). The history of marketing thought provides a means of connecting academic research in marketing to marketing’s lineage and genealogy with the intention of producing appropriately trained researchers. This is a necessity if, as Newton contended in 1676, we are to see further by ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’. Historically informed scholars are critical of any body of knowledge but especially of a young discipline such as marketing, where its structural dimensions are still emerging. If marketing deliberations are to mature, we need to cultivate the concepts, frameworks, theories and knowledge from marketing ‘giants’, and also appreciate the potential theoretical contributions from social sciences ‘greats’. Such historical astuteness extends and strengthens marketing’s intellectual progress (Hollander, 1995).

Such discernment underscores Shaw’s (2010) resurrection of Alderson’s productivity measurement formula for marketing systems. He recognizes that the 1950s barriers to conceptual and measurement empirical testing no longer exist and builds upon Alderson’s 1954 Laws of Reduced
Contracts with Florence’s 1983 Bulk Transactions and his Retail Household construct to present ‘a modern reformulation . . . theoretical approach to marketing systems’ (Shaw, 2010: 363). Juxtaposed to this sensitivity is Wooliscroft’s lament (2008) for a lost intellectual past. In comparing the prize-winning Vargo and Lusch (2004) Service-dominant logic paper to the foundational principles of Alderson’s ‘Theory of Marketing’ as set forth in Dynamic Marketing Behavior (1965), Wooliscroft finds old phenomena reincarnated in new terminology and concludes the discipline ‘has not advanced . . . from where it was 40 years ago’ (Wooliscroft, 2008: 379).

**Cohesion**

Similarly, the ability to avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’ and to elucidate phenomena within their context are necessary perspectives for efficient and effective marketing theory development. The capability to differentiate between marketing thought and the development of marketing practice, thus better understanding how context and socio-economic factors influenced its birth and early childhood is an essential important skill as the marketing discipline continues toward adulthood. Thus the history of thought perceptively frames and locates 21st-century research pursuits. It provides insight and wisdom, identifying patterns and trends for changing times and new challenges. It delivers ‘greater conceptual cohesion’ (Maclaran et al., 2010: 1).

In testimony to this, the 1991 US National Institutes of Mental Health summit meeting was about AIDS interventions. Together, five theorists, Martin Fishbein (Theory of Reasoned Action), Albert Bandura (Social Cognitive Theory), Marshal Becker (Health Belief Model), Harry Triandis (Theory of Subjective Culture and Interpersonal Behaviour) and Frederick Kanfer (Theory of Self Regulation and Self Control) agreed on ‘the eight variables that predict and explain behaviour: intention; environmental constraints; ability; anticipated outcomes (or attitude); norms; self-standards; emotion; and self-efficacy’ (Donovan and Henley, 2010: 155).

In understanding the origins of marketing thought, as Jones and Shaw (2002: 6) comment, ‘history provides insights not found in other forms of analysis’. A historical analysis provides a framework within which to subsequently identify and interpret further developments. Armed with a historical perspective, theoreticians can grapple with complex issues from a diversity of settings enabling practitioners and academics to think about the comparative components of marketing thought. Without it, there is another DNA deficiency in the ancestral understanding as to where marketing has come from, how it evolved, why and where it might potentially go.

Supporting this stance, Savitt (2009: 191) asks ‘do we know what we think we know?’ and points to the lack of validity of Keith’s (1960) marketing revolution and the ‘folklore’ role its four eras has played ‘most likely because authors have not sought out the historical literature or even worse are not aware of important work in marketing history’. Equally, Gummesson (2002: 325) rejects most marketing management textbooks and their 4P’s theory as ‘caught in reminiscences from the 1960s . . . stereotyped on a derelict foundation’. Such historical weaknesses limit and slow the further advance of marketing knowledge.

**Periodization**

The historical periodization approach to marketing literature ‘facilitates understanding by breaking history into smaller chunks’ and is ‘valuable in promoting communication and understanding’, a fact documented by Hollander et al. (2005: 4). A significant advantage for marketing theory development emanates from this historical periodization perspective. It allows scholars to resonate with events, times and turning points they have not directly experienced. The history of marketing thought begins the analytical process of ‘looking back to see ahead’ to contemporary marketing
and beyond (Jones and Shaw, 2002). For example, periodization locates social marketing within the broadening marketing paradigm 1975–2000 era (Wilkie and Moore, 2003), where two different expansion pathways were proposed.

Kotler and Levy (1969) argued for marketing to be applied to non-profits while Lazer (1969) focused upon the societal impact of marketing. Directly reflecting this, two commonly quoted 21st-century textbook definitions of social marketing are: (1) ‘Social marketing is a process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate, and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviours that benefit society as well as the target audience’ (Kotler and Lee, 2008: 7); and (2) ‘Social marketing is concerned with the application of marketing knowledge, concepts and techniques to enhance social as well as economic ends. It is also concerned with the analysis of the social consequences of marketing policies, decisions and activities’ (Hastings, 2007: 9).

Recognizing this initial orientation is necessary but insufficient; historical periodization calls for the infusion of this preliminary point of reference with a comparative and integrative understanding of what other schools of thought can provide. Symbiotic and synthesized interconnections between the schools are observable in social marketing constructs and concepts. When viewed in this mode, macromarketing’s marketing systems, quality of life and value co-creation; the exchange school’s restricted, complex exchange, generic exchange and self and collective interest; together with the consumer behaviour school’s sustainability and ethical consumption focus (Jones and Shaw, 2005; Maclaran et al., 2010) provide fertile investigative ground in modern social marketing (Hastings, 2007; Kotler and Lee, 2008; Donovan and Henley, 2010; Weinreich, 2011). Hence, historical periodization brings clarity, accuracy, depth, breadth, relevance, logic and a strong foundation for comprehensive theorization and growth.

**Methodologically**

If we are concerned about the way scientific knowledge is produced, we must be concerned with how past marketing scholarship, ontologically and epistemologically, shapes future works. A grounding in the history of thought, with historical discussions around the methodology of the discipline versus its techniques, as well as in the context of discovery and justification, enriches and deepens issues surrounding the scientific method and the scientific nature of marketing (Hunt, 1983). Tamilia (2009: 352) argues that ‘a discipline that forgets its past and fails to recognize its founding fathers is a discipline still struggling to legitimize its status as a social science, no matter how much it professes to be scientific’. Shaw (2009: 348) notes that ‘methods for developing, writing and critiquing historical research would make it easier for novices to break into this area and for seasoned scholars to improve their work’. This reinforces the robustness, rigour and relevance of marketing theory, leading to higher levels of theory generalization, integration and conceptualization.

**Pedagogically**

To teach marketing, it is not sufficient to value its literature but necessary as well to identify with the original creators. Knowledge about them, their lives and their influence contributes to deciphering their work and advancing marketing. Such an approach to marketing’s knowledge base aids the research needed to create new wisdom (Shaw, 2009) and instils critical thinking in the marketing theorizations of tomorrow (Wooliscroft and Lawson, 2010).

**Conclusion**

As custodians of future marketing knowledge, we must be alert to the deficiencies of a fragmented marketing understanding. We must proceed with vigilance and be fortified with an integrated past,
present and future perspective of our subject. Only with a solid and deep immersion in the history of marketing thought, can the future of marketing theory be co-authored.

References


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