THE EVOLUTION OF APPLIED MARKETING THEORY AS EVIDENCED BY TEXTBOOK DEFINITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Advocates of context-bound theories suggest that the definitions of key marketing concepts change as the dominant schools of marketing thought changes. Following Fullerton's and Arndt's suggestion to use context-bound theories in assessing the definitions of the key concepts presented in principles textbooks, we examined longitudinal changes in the definition of market. Our results suggest that the post-1960 definitions of market were not derived from general marketing theory (i.e., broad scientific theory); thus principles textbooks are a context-bound source of original marketing thought because their authors may define key concepts independently of general marketing theory.

text-bound theories that are "sensitive to the dimensions of time and space" (Buttle 1989, p.199). Context-bound theorists assume the historian's traditional premise that human events are unique phenomena and the historical sociologist's premise that history is composed of both unique events and evolving patterns of human behavior.

General theories seem to dominate the major scholarly journals. However, do general theories or context-bound theories dominate marketing pedagogy? By focusing on the key concepts presented in principles of marketing and marketing management textbooks, we may find that the marketing theory taught to future practitioners (henceforth, applied marketing theory) is not ahistorical.

INTRODUCTION

"Theory must specify the context(s) in which it applies - and those in which it does not. Marketing theories... are not necessarily universal, but rather may legitimately have temporal and spatial bounds - the quality of a marketing theory is not synonymous with its universality." (Fullerton, 1990).

"A theory of marketing explains how markets work. The ultimate purpose of theory is to find a way of making markets work better," (Alderson, 1965).

Advocates of general (i.e., broad scientific) theories in marketing embrace the logical empiricist paradigm delineated by Hunt (1983). In their view, marketing scholars should limit the scope of their investigations to the search for scientific laws that are "absolute, ahistoric, immutable, and independent of human existence" (Buttle 1989, p.199).

Skeptics of general theories in marketing fault such theories for their ahistoricity, abstractness, and assumption of uniformitarianism (cf. Anderson 1983; Arndt 1985; and Fullerton 1987). As an alternative, these skeptics encourage marketing scholars to develop con-

We proceed here as follows. We begin with a review of our reasons for selecting the scope of our study. Then we present the five basic types of market definitions found in principles textbooks. Next we present our hypotheses and describe our sample and coding procedures. After we report the results of our hypothesis tests, we finish with our conclusions about our findings.

Our results will suggest that applied marketing theory does not mirror general marketing theory stripped of its more abstract elements; rather, applied marketing theory is a distinct, researchable domain of marketing thought. Thus we recommend that marketing scholars and market-

328 American Marketing Association / Winter 1992
ing historians distinguish between general marketing theory and applied marketing theory.

Our paper also represents a new synthesis. From historical sociologists we borrow a research orientation that focuses on changes in the historical patterns of major concepts and institutions. From qualitative researchers we borrow content analysis to analyze longitudinal changes in definitions. Thus we offer a new method for delineating fundamental shifts in key marketing concepts.

**OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SCOPE**

Why We Explored the Concept of ‘Market’

We explore the concept of market because of its importance to marketing theoreticians, its importance to practitioners, and its appropriateness as a domain of study for marketing historians.

First, because marketing "describes and explains the operation of markets" (Savin 1980, p.52), market is a core concept that must be used to define other concepts in marketing; thus market is important to marketing theoreticians. Second, an increasing number of large firms are opting to reorganize their operations relative to their markets (Kirpalani and MacPherson 1979); because more precise definitions of markets will lead to greater firm productivity (Laczniak and Michie 1979), market is important to practitioners. Finally, because markets are social systems, they should be researched with historical methods (Fullerton 1987); thus, market is an appropriate domain of study for historians.

We studied U.S. principles textbooks because they are important to marketing history, marketing pedagogy, and marketing practice. First, these textbooks are a major source of information about the history of marketing thought (Hunt and Goolsby 1988); early marketing textbooks provide an excellent historical record of past business practices (Fullerton 1987). Second, these textbooks reflect differences in the perspectives of the marketing academics.

The proliferation of introductory textbooks in marketing is illustrative of the widely differing conceptions of what real-world elements should be combined to constitute "marketing," from what perspective they should be viewed, and how they should be interpreted (Dawson 1971, p.71).

Third, because of "the steadfast insistence of the business community that research be 'practical' and of immediate applicability to business problem areas" (Dawson 1971, p.71), these textbooks are designed to meet the future practitioner's need for practical solutions. Fourth, these textbooks dominated marketing pedagogy and managerial thought in the twentieth century (Fullerton 1987). Fifth, these textbooks are important pedagogical tools, especially in mass-section classes with limited personalized instructor-student interaction. Sixth, these textbooks have continuing influence on practitioners; over two-thirds of student keep those textbooks perceived as relevant to their future careers (Powell and Rich 1985).

The meanings of words vary in response to societal changes; the patterns of these variations, in and of themselves, contain information about the evolution of thought. "Language changes because ideas change" (Levy and Kose 1979, p.234). In fact, changes in meanings are as interesting as now-accepted meanings.

It is common practice to speak of the 'proper' or 'strict' meaning of a word by reference to its origins.

... The original meanings of words are always interesting. But what is often most interesting is the subsequent variation (Williams 1985, pp.20-21).

The evolving definitions of key concepts are data for the cultural historians and social scientists who trace fundamental changes in cultural and scientific thought. Raymond Williams, a British cultural historian, examined the evolving definitions of what he calls "keywords" in his studies about the interrelation of intellectual currents with social change (e.g., Williams 1983, 1985). Henley et al. (1989) found distinct categories and historical patterns in the definitions of "psychology" found in the introductory psychology textbooks of the last 100 years.

The social order and scope of marketing are maintained through precise definitions of key marketing concepts. Definitions are part of language, and language serves to transmit order. That is, order is implicit in the definitions of the words with which we choose to communicate (Laczniak and Michie 1979, p.215).

**Recapitulation**

Principles textbooks are a resource for scholars who study the evolution of key marketing concepts. Because the "managerial technology of marketing is culture-bound," the principles textbooks are culture-bound (Arndt 1985, p.20); thus we accept Arndt's and Fullerton's
suggestion to use context-bound theories in assessing the definitions of the key concepts presented in principles textbooks.

FIVE DEFINITIONS OF MARKET: AN OVERVIEW

The definition of market found in a principles textbook is often one of five types: (1) a set of conditions, (2) a mathematical function, (3) a set of people who engage in exchange, (4) a set of existing people, and (5) a set of "future people." Though the wording and the complexity of definitions varies from one textbook to another, most definitions are captured by one of these five types.

Those authors for whom market is a set of conditions used two distinct, economically-oriented definitions. Their environmental conditions (EC) definition is based on the traditional economic model, and typically defines market in terms of a physical location, a geographic area, the set of laws governing trade in a geographic area, a system for transferring goods or titles, or various other conditions that normally work to insure free trade. Their microeconomic (ME) definition treats of consumer demand functions. Examples of EC-type and ME-type definitions appear in Figure 1.

The EC-type definition draws its meaning from etymology. Market derives from the Latin word mercatus, meaning (1) trade, traffic, or buying and selling; or (2) a place for trade, market-place, or mart (Lewis and Short 1879). Thus market originally referred to either a physical place in which buying and selling activities occur, or to those activities themselves. Later, market came to mean not the place itself, but everyone living close enough to travel to the place.

Some authors of principles textbooks describe a market as sets of people who engage in exchanges. Whereas an EC-type definition of market discusses places, the exchange-type (henceforth EXCH-type) definition discusses the people (e.g., buyers and sellers) who meet in certain places. The most concise version of this type of definition is in McCarthy (1979):

Market: A group of sellers and buyers bargaining the terms of exchange for goods and services (p.492).

Other examples of EXCH-type definitions appear in Figure 1.

Some authors of principles textbooks describe a market as set of (existing) people who share one or more characteristics (henceforth PPP-type definition). The most concise version of this type of definition is in Pride and Ferrell (1980):

... a market is an aggregate of people who, as individuals or as organizations, have needs for products in a product class and who have the ability, willingness, and authority to purchase such products (p.140).

Other examples of PPP-type definitions appear in Figure 1.

Some authors of principles textbooks describe the market for X as the set of people who will or who might purchase X (henceforth FP-type). The most concise statement of this type of definition is in Kotler (1967):

... a market is all persons or business units who buy or may be induced to buy a product or service (p.13).

Other examples of FP-type definitions appear in Figure 1.

An overly-facile treatment of PPP-type and FP-type definitions would suggest that the present properties of people make them potential buyers; thus there is no real difference between these two types of definitions. Admittedly, the semantic difference is subtle, but the practical consequences are immense. Because FP-type definitions treat, not of static properties, but of potentiality, they assume that marketing activity can work upon the general population to create customers. Thus, by FP-type definitions, marketing practitioners may find or create a market.

Future purchases may be thought of as the result of a firm's marketing mix decisions. Suppose that one marketing decision will lead to purchases by group A, while another marketing decision will lead to purchases by group B. The potential buyers must be the union of group A and group B. Thus, to determine those who potentially could buy X, every reasonable strategy must be taken into account.

HYPOTHESES

Before we can explore how the definition of market has evolved, we must show a seemingly obvious result: that the dominant definition of market has evolved. Thus, logic dictates that we test $H_1$ before we test our other five hypotheses.

$H_1$: The dominant definition(s) of market, as stated in principles textbooks, has (have) shifted over time.
FIGURE 1

Selected Definitions of Market

Environmental Conditions (EC)

The modern market is often a place where rights to goods are bought and sold rather than a place where the physical exchange takes place. (Brown, Edmund Jr. (1925), *Marketing*, p.6)

A market is, then, a center about which the forces leading to exchanges of title operate, and toward which and from which the actual goods tend to travel. ... But the physical presence of the goods is not essential to a market, for the distinguishing characteristic of a market is the fact that exchanges of title take place therein. (Clark, Fred E. (1922), *Principles of Marketing*, p.5)

... A market is a place recognized as a setting for trade. (Enis, Ben (1977), *Marketing Principles: The Management Process*, 2nd ed., p.7)

Microeconomic (ME)


A market may be defined as "the aggregate demand of the potential buyers of a commodity or service." (AMA) An aggregate demand is a composite of the individual demands of all the potential buyers of a product. An aggregate demand, or total market, may also consist of the sum of the demands of different market segments. ... (Stull, Richard R. and Edward W. Cundiff (1966), *Essentials of Marketing*, p.6)

Exchange (EXCH)

Market A group of sellers and buyers bargaining the terms of exchange for goods and services. (McCarthy, E. Jerome (1979), *Essentials of Marketing*, p.492)

A market is the contact between demanders (buyers or lessees) and suppliers (sellers or lessors) for transferring ownership or use rights to a factor, good or service. (Narver, John C. and Ronald Savitt (1971), *The Marketing Economy: An Analytical Approach*, p.57)

A market consists of the buyers and sellers of particular goods and services who deal with each other. (Rosenberg, Larry J. (1977), *Marketing*, p.138)

Present Properties (PPP)

Market All consumers and organizations that have both the need and the ability to make an exchange for the product, service, or idea offered. (Hustad, Stewart W., Dales L. Varble, and James R. Lowry (1989), *Principles of Modern Marketing*, p.703)

The term "market" often is defined as a collection of individual consumers who are able, willing, and ready to buy a given product. (Collins, George Rowland (1938), *Marketing*, p.121)

Markets are people with money to spend—and a desire to spend it. (Duddy, Edward A. and David A. Revzan (1947), *Marketing*, p.8)

(In this book, a market will be defined as people with needs to satisfy, the money to spend, and the willingness...
Figure 1 (continued)

to spend it. (Stanton, William J. (1964), Fundamentals of Marketing, p.76)

Future Purchasers (FP)

A market is a particular group of potential customers. For some products or services, this may represent the entire population. ... For most products or services, however, the market is smaller and more well defined. (Hartley, Robert F. (1983), Marketing Fundamentals, pp.5-6)

A market is the set of all current and potential buyers of a particular product or service. ... By identifying both current and potential buyers, this definition recognizes that markets exist when a product satisfies certain needs and buyers will pay a price acceptable to producers. In other words, a market exists when there is potential for exchange. ... (Busch, Paul S. and Michael J. Houston (1985), Marketing: Strategic Foundations, p.28)

Market: A group of customers or potential purchasers who represent sufficient profit potential to be attractive to the marketer, and who as a group can be identified and reached with a tailored marketing mix. (McDaniel, Carl and William R. Darden (1987), Marketing, p.732)

Multiple Definitions

A market consists of all potential customers sharing a particular need or want who might be willing and able to engage in exchange to satisfy that need or want. (Kotler, Philip (1984), Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, and Control, 5th ed., p.12)

Market: The actual and/or potential buyers of a product or service; or (less frequently) a place where exchanges between buyers and sellers occur. (Mandell, Maurice I. (1985), Marketing, p.721)

Market: a group of sellers and buyers bargaining over the terms of exchange for goods and/or services or a group of potential customers with similar needs and sellers offering various products—that is, ways of satisfying those needs. (McCarthy, E. Jerome and William D. Perreault (1984), Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach, 8th ed., p.814)

If marketers modified their definition of market, what prodded them to do so? Perhaps the answer lies in the declining influence of economics. The academic theories of economics were less relevant to marketers after 1945 because they were searching for applied theories rather than formal theories.

The microeconomic paradigm looks at an abstraction of a market, usually pure competition in a one-level structure. It tells us to study resource allocation by asking questions about supply, demand, transaction efficiency, and levels of information. The reason most often given by marketers for rejecting this paradigm is its excessive abstraction. ... (Carman 1980, p.3).

Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett (1988) and Sheth and Gross (1988) posit that two new schools of marketing thought arose after 1945. The managerial school arose because practitioners needed effective solutions to post-World War II business problems. Concepts borrowed from these practitioners and a "branch of economics focused on the theory of the firm, rather than on demand theory" (Sheth and Gross 1988, p.15) facilitated this school’s ability to focus on applied theory rather than formal theory.

By shifting "the focus of marketing to individual behavior" (Sheth and Gross 1988, p.9) in the 1950s, the managerial school paved the way for the consumer behavior school. Both schools recognized important states and the behaviors of consumers as the fundamental explananda of marketing. Both schools attributed consumer behaviors to consumer perceptions, whether
founded or unfounded.

The previous discussion suggests $H_2$ through $H_4$.

$H_2$: Notions about place and the laws governing trade within a place have become less important in defining market in principles textbooks.

$H_3$: Notions about consumer demand functions have become less important in defining market in principles textbooks.

$H_4$: Notions about consumer behavior have become more important in defining market in principles textbooks.

The marketing concept was pivotal to the evolution and rapid dissemination of the managerial and consumer behavior schools of thought. Whereas the managerial school used the marketing concept to promote its philosophy of profiting from the satisfaction of customer needs, the consumer behavior school probed the psychological processes that lead consumers to express their needs through purchase-related behaviors.

In the more internationally-competitive 1970s and 1980s, marketers began to question the marketing concept. Because the marketing concept treats of buyers and sellers only, it ignores the other parties and forces that determine a firm's long-run success (e.g., competitors, governments, environments). As a result,

... strategic marketing has emerged in response to criticisms that marketing has failed to consider adequately the development of long-term competitive advantage (Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett 1988, p.4).

Because strategic marketing is growing more important to marketers, we test $H_5$.

$H_5$: Notions about business strategy have become more important in defining market in principles textbooks.

What else might have prodded marketers to modify their definition of market? Perhaps the answer lies in the growing importance of exchange. Many general marketing theorists argue that exchange is the central notion of marketing. For example, Bagozzi (1974) proposes that marketing should be defined as "the process of creating and resolving exchange relationships" (p.77); Hunt (1983) proposes that exchange is the fundamental explanation of marketing. If the notion of exchange is the central notion of marketing, then all other marketing concepts, such as market, should be defined in terms of exchange. Thus, we test $H_6$.

$H_6$: The notion of exchange has become more important in defining market in principles textbooks.

THE SAMPLE

We sampled 220 principles textbooks published between 1920 and 1989. (Note: No principles textbooks were published before 1920 (Bartels 1976)). We acquired those textbooks from the libraries of nine major U.S. universities and colleagues accessible to us; a complete list of these books is available upon request. We considered multiple editions by the same author(s) as distinct entities.

Although not probabilistic, our sample is comprehensive. Of the 176 principles textbooks advertised and 115 principle textbooks reviewed in the Journal of Marketing from 1936 to 1989, our sample contains 74.4 percent and 84.3 percent respectively. Of the 199 principles textbooks in our sample published from 1936 to 1989, 65.8 percent was advertised in the Journal of Marketing, 48.7 percent was reviewed in the Journal of Marketing, and 75.9 percent was either advertised or reviewed in the Journal of Marketing. In addition, of the fifty-nine principles textbooks evaluated in Myers, Massy and Greyser (1980), our sample contains 88.1 percent. Finally, of the 107 principles textbooks cited in Bartels (1976) as being important to the history of marketing, our sample contains 73.8 percent.

We searched all 220 principles textbooks for definitions of market. We counted as a definition any statement of the form: (1) a market is defined/conceived/viewed/ 'thought of' as . . . , or (2) a market 'consists of'/'is composed of'/requires . . . , or (3) in this book, market is defined/'will be used to mean' . . . , or (4) market . . . We found such a definition in 73.2 percent of our sample. In most of the remaining sample, the author(s) implied that no such definition was forthcoming. We considered as data only exact verbatim definitions of the above form.

We were concerned that verbatim definitions of market might not reflect a textbook's general orientation; e.g., that economics-oriented explanations of marketing principles might not dominate textbooks with EC-type definitions of market. To allay our concern, we carefully examined twenty-five randomly selected textbooks for consistency between the formal definition of market and the general treatment of marketing principles. Because each textbook was consistent, we feel comfortable that a textbook's formal definition of market reflects its general orientation.

As is true of dictionaries, principles textbooks occa-
tionally define the same word in multiple ways. (See Figure 1 for examples of multiple definitions of market.) Nonetheless, 73.9 percent of the textbooks in our sample with a definition of market contains only one definition.

CODING

We used three M.B.A. students as coders in a two-stage coding procedure. In the first stage, we gave each coder a set of the model definitions we developed and a randomly sequenced list of all the verbatim definitions that appeared in our sample of principles textbooks. (The model definitions listed in Figure 2 helped our coders to classify the various definitions into types.) We asked each coder to assign each verbatim definition to one or more of six categories (i.e., one category for each of the five model definitions and another category for miscellaneous definitions). In a second stage, we asked the three coders to resolve among themselves any coding inconsistencies. Coders were not informed about our hypotheses during either stage.

After stage two, we calculated ‚, the inter-coder reliability coefficient recommended by Perreault and Leigh (1990), for each type of definition and each pair of coders. ‚ ranged from 0.85 to 0.95, and thus far exceeded the minimum levels suggested by Perreault and Leigh.

We summarize the results of our coders' efforts in Table 1.

RESULTS

H concerns whether longitudinal shifts occurred in the types of definitions of market that appeared in the principles textbooks published from 1920 to 1989. Because a Klotz test (Conover 1980) revealed that the variance in the distribution of the PPP-type definitions is significantly larger than the variance in the distribution of the FP-type definitions (p<0.05), we did not use parametric statistics to test H. Instead, we compared the mean rank of the year that each type of definition appeared (with lower and higher ranks assigned to earlier and later definitions respectively) with a Kruskal-Wallis test. The results of the test support H (chi-square=66.1, df=5, p<0.001).

Because the Kruskal-Wallis test shows that the mean
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<th>Period</th>
<th>n</th>
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<th>EXCH</th>
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Key: \( n_i \) = number of textbooks copyrighted during the period  
EC = environmental conditions type of definition  
ME = microeconomic type of definition  
EXCH = exchange type of definition  
PPP = present properties of people type of definition  
FP = future purchasers type of definition  
OTHER = other than one of the above five types  
NONE = no definition of market found

Note: Each row sums to greater than 1.0 because a textbook could contain multiple definitions.

Ranks are unequal, we tested hypotheses 2 through 6 via multiple comparison tests. We used the conservative Bonferroni method to set the critical \( z \) value; our critical \( z \) value of 2.638 shows that we used an overall alpha level of 0.05 for our two-tailed tests. From Gibbons (1976, p.182), the formula for pairwise mean-rank comparisons is:

\[
|R_i - R_j| \leq z \cdot \sqrt{\frac{1}{N^2(N+1)/12}} \cdot \sqrt{\frac{1}{n_i n_j}}
\]

where \( N = \) total sample size; \( n_i \) and \( n_j \) = group sample size; \( z \) = normal standard score.

The results of our multiple comparison tests appear...
TABLE 2

A Chronological Comparison of Principles Textbooks Using Each Type of Definition of Market

| Type    | \( n_i \) | \( \bar{R}_i \) | \( |\bar{R}_1\bar{R}_2|69.4| \) | \( |\bar{R}_3\bar{R}_6|64.4| \) | \( |\bar{R}_4\bar{R}_6|96.4| \) | \( |\bar{R}_5\bar{R}_6|140.5| \) | \( |\bar{R}_6\bar{R}_6|156.1| \) | \( |\bar{R}_6\bar{R}_6|116.8| \) |
|---------|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| EC      | 49        | 69.4           | 0.0            |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| ME      | 27        | 64.4           | 5.0            | 0.0            |                |                |                |                |                |                |
| EXCH    | 19        | 96.4           | 27.0           | 32.0           | 0.0            |                |                |                |                |                |
| PPP     | 72        | 140.5          | 71.1*          | 76.1*          | 44.1*          | 0.0            |                |                |                |                |
| FP      | 29        | 156.1          | 86.7*          | 91.7*          | 59.7*          | 15.6           | 0.0            |                |                |                |
| OTHER   | 25        | 116.8          | 47.4*          | 52.4*          | 20.4           | 23.7           | 39.3           | 0.0            |                |                |

Key: \( n_i \) = number of definitions of this type
- \( \bar{R} \) = mean rank of the year in which this type of definition appeared
- EC = environmental conditions type of definition
- ME = microeconomic type of definition
- EXCH = exchange type of definition
- PPP = present properties of people type of definition
- FP = future purchasers type of definition
- OTHER = other than one of the above five types
- NONE = no definition of market found
* = significant at an overall alpha less than 0.05 (i.e., if each pairwise mean comparison test is significant at the 0.00417 level, with resulting critical z value of 2.638, then the overall alpha level is 0.05).

in Table 2. Because the two economic definitions appear more frequently earlier, \( H_2 \) and \( H_4 \) are supported; thus our results suggest that economic notions are becoming less central to the pedagogy of marketing principles classes. Because PPP-type and FP-type definitions of marketing appear more frequently later, \( H_2 \) and \( H_4 \) are supported; thus our results suggest that consumer behavior and strategy are becoming more central to the pedagogy of marketing principles classes. Because exchange definitions appear more frequently earlier, \( H_5 \) is rejected; thus our results suggest that exchange is becoming less central to the pedagogy of marketing principles classes.

Our results are consistent with Myers, Massy, and Greyser (1980), which notes that the principles textbooks published between 1952 to 1977: (1) shifted from a descriptive to a behavioral-sciences-oriented treatment of consumers; (2) shifted to a more strategic, more managerial focus, and (3) shifted because of the growing importance of the marketing concept.

CONCLUSION

Our empirical results show that five definitions of market dominate the principles textbooks published between 1920 and 1989: two economically-oriented definitions, two noneconomically-oriented definitions, and an exchange-oriented definition. The two economically-
oriented definitions dominate earlier textbooks, and the noneconomically-oriented definitions dominate later textbooks. The fifth definition of market, consistent with the exchange focus advocated by general marketing theorists, appeared sparingly in these textbooks; thus exchange has played only a minor role in defining market in principles textbooks.

Exchange theory has exerted a limited influence on both general marketing theory and applied marketing theory. but it has yet to fulfill its promise of providing a coherent structure for the discipline. . . (Furthermore,) we seem to acknowledge exchange as important, but fail to make use of it as we build our various theories of marketing (Houston and Gassenheimer 1987, p.17).

Perhaps the theoretical abstractness of and the inconsistencies between the different theories of exchange have limited their influence on applied marketing theories.

In summary, we show that the recent definitions of market, as stated in principles textbooks, are not derived from economics. We suggest that the authors of these textbooks define key concepts independently of general theory in marketing; thus principles textbooks are a content-bound source of original marketing thought. Finally, we suggest that the domain of applied marketing theory is ripe for historical study.

REFERENCES


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