What is marketing knowledge?
Stage I: forms of marketing knowledge

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Abstract. Marketing knowledge is the foundation of our discipline. However, there is not yet clear agreement about what marketing knowledge is. Three stages are envisioned in a project to investigate marketing knowledge: identification of the forms of marketing knowledge, specification of and agreement on the content, and development of a comprehensive test to measure acquisition of marketing knowledge. This article attempts the first stage, proposing that the four forms of marketing knowledge are: marketing concepts, structural frameworks, strategic principles, and research principles. Key Words • concepts • frameworks • knowledge • principles • theory

Marketing knowledge is absolutely fundamental to our discipline. Marketing knowledge, supposedly, is what marketing academics and consultants teach and marketing managers draw upon in formulating marketing plans. Obviously, all of us in marketing believe there is a body of marketing knowledge and indeed presuppose its existence (Hunt, 1988). Presuppose is exactly what we have done to date. For instance, the American Marketing Association’s Task Force on the Development of Marketing Thought (1988) devoted a whole issue of the Journal of Marketing to discussing the development and dissemination of marketing knowledge but did not think it necessary to state, preferably at the outset, what ‘marketing knowledge’ is. Recent articles (e.g. Glazer, 1991; Menon and Varadarajan, 1992; Madhavan and Grover, 1998) and books (e.g. Deshpandé, 2001) have been devoted to the use of marketing knowledge without stating what it consists of. Despite several attempts over the last several decades to explain marketing knowledge, most recently those by Garda (1988), Hunt (1991), Marketing Science (1995), and Wierenga and van Bruggen (2000), there has been no clear statement about the forms that marketing knowledge can take, or its content.
As Webster has commented, the basic question is: 'What is the nature of “knowledge” in marketing?' (1988: 48, emphasis added). This article identifies the necessary forms – the nature – of marketing knowledge. These forms have to be identified before we can debate what qualifies as the content of marketing knowledge. In this article, inevitably, in giving examples of the forms of marketing knowledge, reference has to be made to content; however, the examples are only representative, not exhaustive, and the difficult task of deciding which content qualifies will be left to a subsequent study involving leading marketing academics and practitioners. A final study will develop a test of marketing knowledge that can be used internationally as an evaluation standard for marketing education and as an accreditation source for companies and organizations when hiring marketing personnel.

Explication of the nature (the forms) of marketing knowledge is a difficult task in its own right. In this article, the explication begins by identifying what marketing knowledge is not, that is, its ‘extensional’ rather than its ‘intensional’ properties (Teas and Palan, 1997). It is proposed, following the distinction in philosophy due to Ryle (1949), that marketing knowledge is declarative (‘know what’) and that it exists independently of, and should be distinguished from, marketing skills or procedural knowledge (‘know how’); however, the form of procedural knowledge known as ‘tacit knowledge’ is excluded as not being useful for the present purpose. In the second and main part of the article, intensional properties – the fundamental forms – of marketing knowledge are identified and justified. In preview, these forms are: (1) marketing concepts, (2) structural frameworks, (3) strategic principles, and (4) research principles. In the final part of the article, the roles of academics and practitioners in contributing to marketing knowledge are discussed, and the next stages of the project are outlined, which are to reach agreement on the content of marketing knowledge and to develop a test to measure it.

What marketing knowledge is not

Marketing knowledge vs. marketing skills

Marketing knowledge is not the same as marketing skills – skills such as, to borrow Armstrong's (1998) list, forecasting, planning, analysing, creating, deciding, motivating, communicating, and implementing. Marketing knowledge must exist independently of practitioners' ability to use it, so that marketing knowledge can be documented and passed on to others. A widely made distinction is between ‘explicit’ knowledge, or knowledge that can be communicated, and ‘implicit’ knowledge (Polanyi, 1967, especially pp. 79–108), which a user evidently can demonstrate in practice but cannot articulate to others. Tacit knowledge is excluded from the present approach because of its incapacity to be codified and taught.

However, there is a compromise position as far as research principles are
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Concerned. Research principles are one of the four forms of marketing knowledge discussed later. Knowledge about research skills is marketing knowledge, even if the knower does not personally possess the skill. For instance, it is knowledge to know that 'In situation X, research method Y is likely to give the most valid answer.'

Marketing knowledge vs. marketing ability

A further distinction may also be drawn between marketing knowledge and marketing ability. Marketing ability may well depend on the possession of marketing knowledge and the fortunate inheritance of general intelligence, which is now called general mental ability, and probably creativity. The built-in mental ability component is not to be ignored; it is still the best predictor of entry-level job performance (Hunter and Hunter, 1984) and, quite frankly, is likely to be the critical factor in later performance as well.

In this regard, there is a serious question as to whether marketing knowledge has much to do with marketing ability as measured by job performance. A large-scale study by Hunt, Chonko and Wood (1986) demonstrated that neither the short-run nor long-run success of marketing managers, in terms of income received and title achieved, is dependent on having acquired a degree in marketing (in the first 10 years of employment, the correlation between possessing a degree with a marketing major and income is \( r = 0.04 \) and over the total career it is \( r = 0.00 \)). Hunt et al. observed that this does not bode well for the validity of marketing knowledge as taught in academia. This conclusion is hard to avoid, and indeed dissatisfaction with the state and diversity of what is claimed to be known in marketing is a powerful motivation for the present project. However, it should additionally be realized that job success is a reward for skills of enactment (and, yes, tacit performance knowledge) and not just knowledge possession per se. Again, there is a necessary distinction between marketing knowledge, an entity in itself, and the possession of 'marketing ability', which is not the concern here.

The foregoing headings identify the present viewpoint on what marketing knowledge is not. Three subject areas that many commentators think should be included in marketing knowledge are discussed next, explaining how these areas are incorporated in the present approach. The three areas are business strategy knowledge, buyer behaviour, and marketing engineering.

Marketing knowledge is part of business strategy knowledge

It is evident that there has emerged quite a large overlap of marketing knowledge with business strategy knowledge. This has been pointed out by a number of commentators, and persistently by Day (Day and Wensley, 1983; Day, 1992; Day and Montgomery, 1999). The evident overlap is a common complaint by business school students, and a comparison of the strategy textbooks and journals and marketing textbooks and journals will easily reveal duplication of such concepts as growth-share matrices, principles of strategic planning, and research proce-
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articles

dures. Given that marketing is an essential business function (Drucker, 1964), the overlap is not too surprising.

The positive viewpoint adopted in the present approach is that marketing needs to identify and develop its own strategic principles. The form of these (a subject of the present article) should be instructive for business strategy principles. Some of the marketing principles, it is anticipated, will be taken up as part of the business strategy discipline.

Marketing knowledge and buyer behaviour

Marketing knowledge incorporates knowledge of the firm and its competitors, hence the overlap with business strategy, and, virtually by definition of what ‘marketing’ is, knowledge of potential and current customers, that is, buyer behaviour. However, the strong position taken in the present approach is that neither theories of buyer behaviour (e.g. ‘the’ theory, in Howard and Sheth, 1969, but see the more concise three-stages models in Howard, 1977; Sheth, 1973; Engel, Blackwell and Miniard, 1995) nor empirical findings about buyer behaviour (see ‘empirical generalizations’ discussed below under ‘Strategic principles’) qualify directly as marketing knowledge.

Theoretical hypotheses about the causes of buyer behaviour, preferably with fair degrees of tested support, must be converted into the form of marketing knowledge that in the present approach is called ‘strategic principles’. The hypotheses must be stated prescriptively to be considered by marketing managers. For instance, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) is a theoretical hypothesis but, to be useful to managers as ‘knowledge’, it has to be converted to a strategic principle (actually two principles, one for ‘low involvement’ and the other for ‘high involvement’ buying decisions). Notice the argument here that theories in theory form do not qualify as knowledge.

Similarly, the findings of buyer behaviour investigations, the more generalizable ones, of course, but also specific data observations (see later), must be interpreted for their strategic implications.

Buyer behaviour is thus incorporated in, though is not on its own a form of, marketing knowledge. This is not to say that buyer behaviour theories and facts should not be taught as such, but rather that they are not in themselves marketing knowledge.

Marketing knowledge and marketing engineering

A recent school of thought, represented most cogently by Lilien’s ‘marketing engineering’ approach (Lilien and Rangaswamy, 1998), is that marketing knowledge should be based not on conceptual content but on knowing how to carry out market research procedures. According to Lilien: ‘Marketing is no longer based primarily on conceptual content. Marketing resembles design engineering: putting together data, models, analyses, and computer simulations to design effective marketing plans’ (ISBM Newsletter, 1998).
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The present approach accommodates, rather than moves over to, this viewpoint. The fourth form of marketing knowledge in the present approach is 'research principles', which is conceptualized as knowledge of 'what type of research to use, when', rather than specifically how to do it (see the skills distinction previously). Even if marketing were to be taught as technical, procedural knowledge, it is evident that there must be conceptual knowledge to guide the technical applications.

The forms of marketing knowledge

Four forms of marketing knowledge are proposed: marketing concepts, structural frameworks, strategic principles, and research principles. Marketing concepts are the building blocks of marketing knowledge and are needed to understand the other three forms, since these contain concepts. Structural frameworks are models that are non-causal – in everyday terminology, they are 'useful checklists'. Strategic principles are hypothesized causal models that relate one concept to another in a functional 'if, do' form. Research principles are hypothesized causal models pertaining specifically to the appropriate use of particular research techniques. The four forms of marketing knowledge are explained and justified below.

Marketing concepts

Any science or discipline has a set of concepts whose definitions have to be known by users of the discipline. Whereas it is easy in principle to agree on the set of concepts, it is much more difficult to decide on adequate definitions for them because, as pointed out by Brodbeck (1982), Teas and Palan (1997) and many philosophers before them, we always run into the constraints of natural language. Language ambiguities can be sorted out with diligent effort (for an excellent illustration, see Schoonhoven, 1981). A special effort (in the subsequent study) will be needed to get experts to agree on appropriate, widely understood language for describing marketing concepts. Pfeffer (1993) argues that in disciplines that are not paradigmatically well developed – such as marketing (see Hunt, 1991) – consensus is necessary for the advancement of knowledge.

A concept names an object and describes what it is by listing its necessary attributes. Examples of marketing concepts would be Marketing (itself), Market, and Market Segmentation. For instance, Market Segmentation might be defined by the attributes of (1) dividing the total market into subgroups with different needs or preferences, (2) developing differentiated product offerings designed to meet the different needs or preferences, and (3) being able to sell these differentiated products at greater total profit than could be achieved without segmentation. Some readers will disagree with this definition, and that is to be expected. Disagreement simply reinforces the need for a study with experts, which is planned for the second stage of this project, to produce satisfactory definitions of these fundamental marketing concepts.
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The set of marketing concepts that is included in this form of marketing knowledge will flow on to the other three forms: structural frameworks, strategic principles, and research principles. It is anticipated that the set would cover the topics accepted in most marketing textbooks, which are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Proposed list of topic areas for marketing concepts

- Business strategy concepts
- Product and service concepts (including new product development concepts)
- Pricing concepts
- Distribution concepts
- Salesforce management concepts
- Advertising concepts
- Promotion concepts
- Buyer behaviour concepts
- Market research concepts

The question of ‘how specific?’ naturally arises. The concepts under each of these topics range from basic, as covered in broad marketing management textbooks, to advanced, as found only in topic-focused books such as Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham (1996) on the marketing of services, Wind (1982) on product policy, Rossiter and Percy (1997) on advertising and promotions, and Monroe (1979) on pricing. The answer to the question of specificity will come from the experts. The solution will probably be sets of basic through advanced concepts, probably at two or three levels, in keeping with the idea that knowledge in any discipline ranges from basic to specialized.

What is meant by ‘knowing’ the definition of a marketing concept is a matter of degree. Miller (1999) discusses various types of evidence for knowing what a word means which apply to knowing what a concept means. It would appear that the strongest evidence is the user’s ability to spontaneously give an adequate definition, that is, by recall. Somewhat weaker evidence, but probably adequate to conclude that a user knows the concept, is the user’s ability to select the correct, complete definition from incorrect and incomplete ones, that is, by recognition. In the final study, which will develop an operational test of marketing knowledge, both types of evidence of knowing will be used. Indications of these are given when discussing the remaining knowledge forms.

Structural frameworks

A structural framework in marketing is a descriptive list of concepts, in serial or grid format, that helps to organize, and therefore begins to solve, a marketing problem. Garda, a McKinsey practitioner, refers to the purpose of frameworks as being ‘to help the marketer think about a concept [a problem]’ (1988: 35). The
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main advantage of experts, such as marketing consultants, is that they are better than most people at applying structure to ill-structured problems (Spence and Brucks, 1997). Day and Montgomery (1999) go so far as to state that frameworks and typologies are often more useful to managers than theories, though often as ‘a precursor to actual theory building’ (p. 12). Because structural frameworks do not specify causal relationships between concepts, they precede theories.

Well-known structural frameworks in marketing are the 4Ps of the marketing mix, and the additional 3Ps of the services marketing mix. There are, of course, many other candidates, even for what the ‘Ps’ should comprise. These decisions will need to be determined by the experts in the subsequent study. Other useful frameworks are not so widely known because they are more specific in their applications, such as the lists suggested by Lehmann and Winer (1988) for producing marketing plans, the lists in Rossiter and Percy (1997) for producing advertising plans, the BCG Grid and the FCB Grid.

The shorter, more fundamental of the structural frameworks should be recallable by marketing managers. The 4Ps list is a good example. It is very useful for the manager to recall the 4Ps when a specific marketing problem such as an ‘advertising problem’ arises: is it the Advertising that is the problem, or do the Product, Price, and Place of distribution need to be considered? And could some of these factors interact with the advertising? Similarly, the additional 3Ps of the marketing mix for services—People, Physical evidence, and Process—are also useful for marketing managers of services to have ‘top of mind’ (see, for example, Rust et al., 1996).

However, it is not to be expected that longer and usually more specialized lists, or grids whose size exceeds 2×2 cells, could be recalled in their entirety. For these, it is only important that the manager recalls to use such a list, knows which is a good list, and where to get it (nowadays, usually on one’s PC). The test for longer structural frameworks as marketing knowledge would be to know whether the framework is comprehensive and proven (a recognition test).

Strategic principles

Strategic principles are prescriptions for managerial actions recommended as ‘best’ in given situations. They are conditional and normative: ‘If the market situation is X, then do Y.’ These prescriptive ‘if, do’ statements are to be distinguished sharply from descriptive statements known as ‘empirical generalizations’, which are of ‘if, then’ form: ‘If the market situation is X, then Y will happen’ (this distinction is due to Eliashberg, Lilien and Kim, 1995). Empirical generalizations are not strategic principles, although it will be reasoned shortly that they can be usefully turned into strategic principles in many cases.

Strategic principles are a dynamic, causal framework form, in contrast to the preceding static, structural framework form. Strategic principles imply a causal relationship between one concept and another, and often between multiple concepts and a single dependent concept. They are also called ‘stylized marketing models’ (Lilien, 1994) or ‘cause maps’ (Eden, Ackermann and Cropper, 1992;
Priem and Rosenstein, 2000), and when drawn in causal box-and-arrow form, 'argument maps', or 'reason maps' (The Reason Group, 2000). An example (written) is: 'If industry is (X1) highly regulated and (X2) intensely price focused, then (Y1) a production orientation rather than (Y2) a market orientation should be pursued in order to (Z) maximize profit' (the source for this principle is a study by Wong and Mavondo, 2000). In many such principles the ultimate outcome (Z) is evident and can be omitted, so that the X → Y relationship is the main content.

An important distinguishing characteristic of a causal model as compared with a statistical, correlational model is that a causal model spells out the 'why' of the relationship. This means that empirical generalizations, such as identified by Ehrenberg (Uncles, Ehrenberg and Hammond, 1995) are insufficient. Both Simon (1994) and Rossiter (1994) have made this point. For instance, the statement that 'the larger the brand’s penetration, the larger will be its repeat rate, and thus its total sales' is an empirical generalization. For all repeat-purchase products and services – a condition – this statement is true, on average. The most likely explanation of why this happens is the broader distribution and availability of larger brands, even in small retail outlets (Farris, Olver and de Kuyver, 1989; Fader and Schmittlein, 1993). If so, this requires the inclusion of an extra concept in the model, that of distribution. This is needed in order for the empirical generalization to be converted to a causal model that is thereby a useful principle for the manager. The strategic principle, briefly stated, would be: 'If yours is a repeat-purchase brand, then get its distribution as high as is practically possible.' Of course, how to achieve this high distribution probably requires the invocation of another one or two strategic principles, to do with making and advertising a good product in the first place. Another example of an empirical generalization being converted into a strategic principle is the addition of explanatory variables indicating how to change, rather than simply to tolerate, order-of-entry effects (Urban, Carter, Gaskin and Mucha, 1986).

All strategic principles will be conditional. The conditionality is the 'context' of the principle’s applicability (Foxall, 1999). It has become increasingly clear that there are no universal principles in marketing, not even involving the Marketing Concept, Market Segmentation, the Product Life Cycle, or Relationship Marketing (see, for example, Day and Montgomery, 1999). The reality, even at a fairly macro level, is a set of market scenarios such as Stable markets, Hysteresis, Escalation, and Evolution (Dekimpe and Hanssens, 1999) for which the strategic recommendations are different.

The search for a valid set of strategic principles is not going to be an easy one. Armstrong and Schultz (1993) searched nine major textbooks in marketing, including Kotler (1988), and found only 20 statements that they believed qualified as 'providing meaningful principles'. A large part of the problem is that textbook writers, with few exceptions, notably Urban and Star (1991) and Rossiter and Percy (1997), do not state their recommendations in a format recognizable as principles, which Armstrong and Schultz defined as 'normative statements that specify a condition followed by a suggested action' (1993: 253). Underlying this problem is the fact that most textbook writers simply avoid committing to
principles, preferring the easier option of saying 'well it could be this, or it could be that' without digging deep to identify the distinguishing conditions. The problem of not specifying conditions also occurs with hypotheses proposed by academic researchers, hypotheses that, if supported, could become strategic principles. In an audit of over 1700 empirical studies published in the six leading marketing journals over the past 15 years, Armstrong, Brodie and Parsons (2001) found that 89 percent did not incorporate conditions in their hypotheses, implying impossibly general applications.

A promising source of strategic principles will be the various available expert systems, or more precisely, knowledge-driven marketing management systems that are rule-based (Wierenga and van Bruggen, 2000). Excluded here are case-based ‘marketing’ expert systems as these are not prescriptive, or not directly so unless you are sure you are closely matching a successful case and the situational factors have not changed substantially (see also Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Théorêt, 1976 for evidence that enacted strategies are much more complex than can ever be stated, and Golden, 1992 for evidence that managers often self-servingly and inaccurately recall the strategy they used as recently as two years ago, even when a fairly basic description of strategic alternatives is used). An advantage provided by expert systems over searching the academic literature for well-supported hypotheses is that this is what expert-system developers have already done, although it should be pointed out that many of the rules in expert systems have had to be ‘best judgement’ based rather than waiting out the slow process, given the lack of adequate statistical power in perhaps half of published studies (Mone et al., 1996) and low rate of replication studies (Hubbard and Armstrong, 1994), of compiling strong empirical support. Another advantage is that the rules in expert systems are already in prescriptive ‘if, do’ form; they have to be, by nature of an expert system. A limitation is that many of the best expert systems are private, company-owned systems which would not be put in the public domain for our use. However, quite a number of those developed originally by academics (not named here – see Wierenga and van Bruggen, 2000 for most of them) are available, such as BRANDAID and BRANDFRAME for marketing mix rules, CALLPLAN for sales force allocation, and ADCAD and ESAP for advertising.

Popular writers (practitioners) are certainly much bolder in stating principles; thus we have titles of books like The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing (Ries and Trout, 1993) and The New Marketing Manifesto: The 12 Rules for Building Successful Brands in the 21st Century (Grant, 2000). But practitioners’ prescriptions typically have the opposite problem – they state their principles unconditionally and all too cryptically (e.g. Ries and Trout’s ‘It’s better to be first in the mind than to be first in the marketplace’, 1993: 14). However, an expectation is that the writings of practitioners will produce a very good yield of marketing principles, once their recommendations are reviewed by experts and placed into the acceptable conditional, causal form. There are several reasons for this expectation. One is the low yield from academic writings, as noted. Another is the somewhat Darwinian selection process that has gone before: rules proposed by practitioners are more likely to have worked, at least conditionally. Cialdini, an academic psychologist,
famously turned to practitioners rather than to the social psychology literature, or the marketing literature on personal selling for that matter, to formulate his 'six principles of influence' (1993). Finally, strategic principles in marketing ultimately have to be used by practitioners. Expert practitioners as the source may be more likely to stimulate adoption of the principles.

A 'best beliefs' criterion must be used to decide the truth and breadth of applicability of various strategic principles. Epistemologically, all knowledge consists of 'best beliefs' rather than absolute truths. The worth of these beliefs depends on accumulated evidence from experiments or the experienced judgement of practitioners who have essentially been conducting experiments or quasi-experiments (Campbell and Stanley, 1966) in the field for a number of years.

Rossiter (1994) pointed out a paradox regarding the usefulness of strategic principles for managers. Given the apparent premium on doing things differently from one's competitors, broad strategic prescriptions are useful to know but are not likely to be sufficient for management of the individual brand. Rossiter's comment, on Ehrenberg's (1994) call for a totally inductive approach to formulating marketing laws, which would be to form generalizations based on the analysis of many sets of data, was that 'managers would be ill-advised to use a generalized theory from academia to which all competitors have access – unless they can be sure of differential success in implementation' (p. 120). More likely, assuming that the manager wants to differentiate, the relevant strategic principle will be taken as a starting point, then the manager will develop a different, perhaps quite contrary, variation of it for implementation in a particular case. The reality is that the majority of managers' idiosyncratic, derived principles will never appear in the public domain (see Little, Lodish, Hauser and Urban, 1994, and see Parsons, Gijsbrechts, Leeftang and Wittink, 1994 for disclosure of a number of highly effective cases). Nevertheless, broader strategic principles, applicable to the entire product or service category, have to be used as a starting point.

Why exclude data as a form of marketing knowledge? Many (e.g. Wierenga and van Bruggen, 2000) would claim that empirical facts or 'data' are a form of marketing knowledge. As with empirical generalizations, the present perspective is that marketing facts are preliminary forms of – convertible into – marketing strategy principles. Here is an example. One empirical generalization as determined from meta-analysis is that the average price elasticity of demand, all else equal, is −1.76 (Tellis, 1988). This piece of information, of itself, is not of value until it is turned into a strategic principle such as 'If you calculate the price elasticity of demand for your brand and it is different from the usual value of −1.76, then find out why' (which would then require a research principle to do so). By the same argument, a very specific piece of market data or information, such as a price elasticity of −3.40, would also carry a strategic implication, namely, for the manager to identify the condition or conditions, if not already known, that have produced this much greater than average result. Empirical generalizations, which are the most general type of data, are just averages. The strategic principles come from understanding the reasons for deviations from these averages in individual case data.
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Strategic principles do not have to come only from data, that is, by induction. Many come deductively, by ‘disciplined imagination’ (Weick, 1989), by just thinking about what should happen in a given situation; the author can reveal that, due to frequent gaps in the advertising research literature, quite a few of the principles in Rossiter and Percy (1997) had to be derived this way. They may also be derived through deductive logic, from basic axioms; as Schmittlein (1994) notes, Hauser’s (1988) pricing and positioning principles were derived in this manner.

Research principles

Research principles have a similar form to strategic principles in that they are conditional and prescriptive. The prescription, though, is to use or commission a particular market research technique, rather than to take a particular strategic action. Research principles have the basic form: ‘In situation X, use technique Y.’ More precisely, with reference to the manager, they may be stated as: ‘If your state of knowledge of the market is X (where X is less than it should be), use technique Y to find the answer.’ Schmittlein (1994: 125) expresses this view of research techniques as principles very well:

That is, when marketing engineering is used, some methodology (for example, for estimating price responsiveness) must be used (or is advocated by the literature). Which approach should the analyst try? . . . [in] many of these engineering applications, the analyst will be able to personally investigate the performance of the chosen methodology, and if that choice was poor, try another.

The various major market research techniques – such as qualitative interviews, customer surveys, conjoint measurement, advertising pretests, and tracking studies – would be included in the first form of marketing knowledge as marketing concepts. It is further likely that the basic steps involved in each of the research techniques would be useful structural frameworks in the second form of marketing knowledge. Again, the expectation is not that the marketing manager has to have the skills to perform these types of research, for that is the job of market research specialists, but rather that they have sufficient understanding of how each technique ‘works’ in order to know when and why to use it, and also how to interpret the findings for feeding forward into strategy.

This is also where buyer or consumer behaviour models come in. Although it is common to refer to ‘principles’ of buyer and consumer behaviour, these are not strategic principles. Rather, information about this behaviour may form the basis for a strategic principle, as in the price elasticity example earlier, where buyers are responding much more strongly than usual to price changes in the market. Of course, one of the most important usages of market research is to develop a buyer or consumer behaviour model in the first place. The research principle here would be: ‘If you don’t have a clear and up-to-date understanding or “model” of buyer or consumer behaviour in your product category, commission qualitative research for that purpose.’
The proposed four forms of marketing knowledge are reviewed in Table 2 for convenient reference.

Table 2

**Proposed forms of marketing knowledge**

*Marketing Concepts*  Set of marketing terms, each defined by its essential attributes. Examples: Marketing; Market; Segmentation; Focus Group Research.

*Structural Frameworks*  Descriptive lists of concepts, in series or grid format, that help to organize or 'frame' a marketing problem. Examples: 4Ps of the Marketing Mix; additional 3Ps of the Services Marketing Mix; checklist for commissioning Focus Group research; BCG Grid; FCB Grid.

*Strategic Principles*  Conditional prescriptive 'if, do' statements of the best course of action to take given the situation. Examples: 'If your brand is the market leader, adopt or maintain "central benefits" positioning'; 'If yours is a follower brand, consider "differentiation on a major benefit" or a "central me-too" positioning.'

*Research Principles*  Conditional prescriptive 'if, use' statements of the best research technique given the research question. Examples: 'If you are losing touch with customers or suspect that the market is undergoing change, commission "phenomenological" qualitative research'; 'If you need to establish the importance of attributes and forecast the effects of possible modifications in attribute delivery, use conjoint analysis.'

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**Conclusions and future steps**

The American Marketing Association's Taskforce on the Development of Marketing Thought in 1988 concluded that there has been 'too little effort directed to systematic development of marketing knowledge' (AMA, 1988: 4). This observation is still relevant. The major reason for this is avoidance of the logically prior question of what exactly marketing knowledge is. The first answer to this question has to be to identify the forms that marketing knowledge can take, which has been the purpose of this article. The second answer, then, will be to debate and agree on the content of marketing knowledge. A final answer will be to develop a test of this knowledge.

Marketing knowledge has four forms: (1) marketing concepts, which are definitional building blocks of knowledge in our discipline; (2) structural frameworks, which are lists of concepts selected and organized to frame marketing problems so that they might better be solved; (3) strategic principles, which are conditional 'if, do' recommendations for managerial actions; and (4) research principles, which are conditional 'if, use' recommendations about the research techniques that are likely to give the best answers based on managers' states of knowledge about the market. Marketing knowledge in the sense of 'market information' is incorporated as a strategic principle rather than being seen as an additional form of knowledge.
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The future

The view espoused by Lehmann (1996) in his 1995 ACR Presidential address is that marketing academics must become more involved in ‘knowledge development and translation’ (p. 3). Lehmann sees this as the primary future function of academics, anticipating, with the spread of online course delivery, that the teaching function may become largely automated. Whereas many academics, those who do research, are already involved in knowledge development, it is the translation aspect that needs more emphasis. Lehmann sees this as conducting research in a way that is suitable for input to meta-analysis and also conducting meta-analyses of research findings in a given area. But, as this article’s discussion of forms of marketing knowledge has indicated, the academic’s role is much more than this. Academics should be sharpening definitions of marketing concepts, evaluating structural frameworks for their completeness, clarity and applicability, formulating strategic principles as ‘if, do’ rules, and similarly identifying the appropriate conditions for the use of various research techniques, as principles.

An important part of the translation task – which has not yet been attempted – is to closely examine the strategic principles proposed by marketing practitioners (for marketing strategy, see Ambler, 1992; Ries and Trout, 1993; Grant, 2000; for research principles, see Clancy and Shulman, 1991). Practitioners, through popular books, consultancies, and in-house company training programmes, command a much larger audience of marketing managers than do marketing academics teaching in business schools (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1996). For instance, a survey of practitioner members of the American Marketing Association found that only about 30 percent subscribed to the Journal of Marketing and 19 percent to the Journal of Marketing Research (AMA, 1988). Assuming that these figures from over a decade ago have not changed much, they imply that at least half of marketing managers learn marketing knowledge from more popular, mostly non-academic, sources. What is circulating as ‘practitioner marketing knowledge’ must be codified and translated into the form of strategic principles, and this work will doubtless have to be done by academics.

Regarding academic contributions to marketing knowledge, an important task will be to develop valid measures of important marketing constructs and to present quantitative findings less obscurely (Day and Montgomery, 1999). Toward these goals, a working paper by Rossiter (2001) documents the limitations of the widely used ‘Churchill procedure’ and proposes a new paradigm for scale development in marketing.

The specific next stage of the current work is to organize an expert panel, comprising leading marketing academics and practitioners, to attempt to reach agreement on the content of marketing knowledge. As mentioned in the article, this will require specification of the most important marketing concepts, agreement on their definition, specification of structural frameworks, and, most difficult, identification of what constitutes strategic principles, with expert judgement of their truth status. These judgements must be born of analysis, not memory; see Miner (1984) on this important difference. This stage of the project may be the
most difficult task ever attempted in marketing, but it is a task that we cannot avoid if our discipline is to claim that it has a 'body of marketing knowledge'. The final stage will be to develop an operational test of marketing knowledge for the evaluation of teaching curricula in marketing and for possible use by organizations when hiring marketing personnel.

Notes

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1 The philosophy of science informing this project can be classified as realist (knowledge exists independently of perceivers) and modern empiricist (knowledge is not absolute but must be based on 'best beliefs' at the time). See Hunt (1991) and Hendry (2000) for discussion of these perspectives.

2 Attempts to measure tacit knowledge among business managers (Wagner, 1987; Sternberg, Wagner, Williams and Horvath, 1995) have basically produced test items consisting of self-management (e.g. 'Do goal-relevant tasks first') and personnel management (e.g. 'Listen, then speak') skills. As argued later, skills like these may be handy for managers to have but they do not represent knowledge of the content of marketing.

3 For instance, Positioning has been suggested as a mix variable but arguably it is a derivative composite of Product, Pricing and Promotion and, to some extent, Place.

4 Penetration is highly correlated with repeat rate in all categories, from new cars to cookies (Uncles et al., 1995).

5 Miner (1984) assessed 32 established theoretical frameworks from the domain of personnel management in terms of scientific validity (empirical support) and, independent of that, their usefulness in practice. For these assessments, he intended to rely on the judgements of the 35 knowledgeable scholars who nominated the frameworks, which were selected on a frequency count of nominations. He could not use a full count of the 'panel' for the assessments because his own extensive analysis of the literature revealed that many of the experts were fully up to date with evidence pertaining only to the several frameworks in their area of specialization. For the present second-stage project, analytic reviews by a minimum of three experts will be necessary.

References


What is marketing knowledge?
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Webster, F.E., Jr. (1988) 'Comment by Frederick E. Webster, Jr.', *Journal of Marketing* 52(4): 48–51.

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