
Evolution of Marketing as a Discipline: What Has Happened and What to Look Out For

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Evolution of Marketing as a Discipline: What Has Happened and What to Look Out For

Journal of Marketing (*JM*) is in the midst of exciting times—times that reflect economic vacillations, quick changes in business environments, and the emergence of new industries and markets. To stay current with and responsive to the changes in the business world—a top priority of *JM* through the years—future research directions must be precise, rigorous, and relevant. In other words, this is a crucial period for the marketing discipline to reaffirm its position in providing new knowledge and thought that will have a lasting effect on academicians and practitioners.

Evolving Themes and Metaphors

Over the decades, the marketing discipline has experienced changes in terms of its dominant focus, thought, and practice. Amid all the changes, *JM* has been at the forefront of bringing such themes to prominence and garnering the attention of the research community. At each stage of its evolution, the discipline has taken a new course by bringing to light pertinent areas of marketing and generating important insights that continue to shape further research. Whereas the six decades after 1936 witnessed gradual changes in the research and practice of marketing, beginning in 1996, the discipline has experienced a faster rate of evolution, with several marketing topics and foci coming into the popular view concurrently. Drawing on Kerin's (1996) systematic study, which contains the themes and metaphors of the marketing discipline as they relate to *JM*'s evolution from 1936 to 1995, I provide my observations about more recent history and trends since 1996 in this editorial. Table 1 illustrates this trend.

In compiling Table 1, I draw specific attention to the triggers for the themes. Over the years, it has been clear that the marketing discipline is evolving continuously. To understand these changes and identify the forthcoming turning points in the field, I believe it is critical to identify the causes responsible for the changes thus far. My goal for this editorial is to shed light on the factors that have shaped

marketing and articulate an expectation of where the field is headed. To Roger Kerin's existing categorization, I add my viewpoints on the triggers that have spurred the changes. My aim is to provide an evolutionary perspective regarding the future course of marketing by observing the current triggers. This, I hope, will add value and direction to scholarly discussions of marketing research topics. I conclude with a note on the importance of being able to identify the triggers and how these triggers will likely shape the field's future.

A Resource-Conscious View

The marketing discipline adopted a resource-conscious view between 1996 and 2004, focusing on customer profitability issues and the use of organizational resources to enhance marketing effectiveness. Specifically, researchers conducted studies in the following four broad areas: (1) identifying the customer value potential for the organization and building an approach to appropriately align marketing resources, (2) maximizing the value of each customer, (3) optimizing marketing resources for customers at the individual and segment levels, and (4) developing and implementing resource allocation strategies on the basis of customer profitability. The focus on customer profitability and marketing resources, however, did not emerge without reason. Looking back, three critical factors seem to have triggered this wave of research, as Figure 1 illustrates.

First, significant changes with respect to data storage and processing enabled sophisticated empirical studies. These changes included the type of data sought (e.g., behavioral, attitudinal), the type of data collected (e.g., individual level), and the nature of data processing (e.g., handling megabytes and gigabytes of data). Furthermore, data warehousing applications, storage service providers, and storage-intensive consumer applications contributed to the data-oriented approach marketing academia began to take.

Second, the abundance of data and the ease of data collection enabled researchers to capture individual customer data, thereby directing the level of analysis toward the customer level. This called for scholars to make an assessment of the needs and wants of individual customers and to identify appropriate ways and means of communication. Such an approach necessitated identifying customers' lifetime value, which in turn led managers to reserve strategic marketing resources for the areas in which the expenditures would generate the greatest impact.

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TABLE 1
Evolution of Marketing Thought and Practice

Timeline	Prominent Theme(s)	Predominant Metaphor	Triggers for the Themes ^a
1936–1945	Illuminating marketing principles and concepts	Marketing as applied economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding of marketing principles through case studies ● Need to comprehend government legislation and trade regulations ● Marketing research topics and implications for marketing practice
1946–1955	Improving marketing functions and system productivity	Marketing as a managerial activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accountability of marketing functions and system productivity to marketing theory and science ● Focus on the growth of marketing discipline ● Identification of marketing functions and deciding on the definition of marketing
1956–1965	Assessing market mix impact	Marketing as a quantitative science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on marketing theory development ● Transition into analytical studies ● Interest in statistical quality control
1966–1975	Uncovering buyer and organizational processes	Marketing as a behavioral science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need for establishing clear agendas for the marketing discipline ● Articles highlighting directions for further research ● Spotlight on marketing practice through <i>JM</i>'s "Applied Marketing" section
1976–1985	Crafting market/marketing strategy	Marketing as a decision science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Refocus to a "scholarly professional journal" through editorial policy changes ● Emphasis on theory development and understanding market structure ● Outlook toward the use of quantitative techniques in marketing
1986–1995	Identifying market/marketing contingencies	Marketing as an integrative science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of sophisticated empirical techniques ● Emergence of conceptual frameworks of marketing phenomena ● Use of interdisciplinary knowledge
1996–2004 ^b	Customer profitability studies and resource allocation efforts	Marketing as a scarce resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developments in database technology ● Ability to capture individual customer data ● Analyses performed at the individual level
2005–2012 ^b	Marketing accountability and customer centrality	Marketing as an investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Technological advancements ● Deeper customer insights to aid marketing initiatives ● Marketing investment activities directed at the customer level
Emerging (2013–present) ^b	Marketing at the core and new media influence	Marketing as an integral part of the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Changes in media usage patterns ● Focus on marketing efficiency and effectiveness ● Firm value generated by engaging stakeholders of the firm

^aMy interpretations added to Kerin's (1996) categorization.

^bMy extension, based on the developments in the marketing discipline.

Notes: I adapted and updated this table from Kerin (1996).

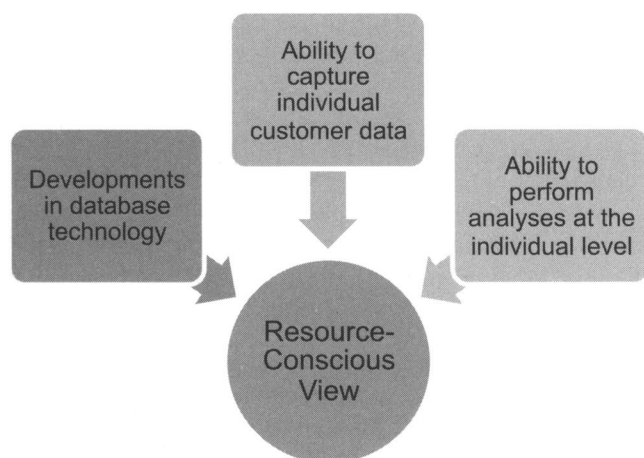
Third, the aforementioned factors have significantly helped the development of new analytical and empirical methods. The benefit of such an approach became evident in the industry when managers became empowered to determine the frequency of each of the available marketing and communication strategies such that customer lifetime value was maximized. This line of marketing thought and practice gradually increased the knowledge base in this area and shaped the resource-conscious view.

During these years, the focus of the discipline as a whole was also reflected in *JM* articles that contributed sophisticated empirical studies pertaining to the use of marketing resources. Some of the key studies in *JM* in this area include articles on the integration of marketing with business processes and shareholder value (Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey 1999), governance value analysis to address marketing strategy decisions (Ghosh and John 1999), long-life customers and profitability (Reinartz and Kumar 2000), the measurement of customer lifetime duration in noncontractual settings (Reinartz and Kumar 2003), customer relationship efforts on retention (Verhoef 2003), resource allo-

cation when future brand-switching behavior is detected (Rust, Lemon, et al. 2004), investments in communication channels for managing customer relationships (Duncan and Moriarty 1998; Venkatesan and Kumar 2004), and customer portfolio management (Johnson and Selnes 2004). Other areas that exhibited this focus include studies on innovation (Chandy, Prabhu, and Antia 2003; Chandy and Tellis 2000; Shih and Venkatesh 2004), new product development (Moorman and Miner 1997; Rindfleisch and Moorman 2001; Urban, Weinberg, and Hauser 1996), and firm strategy (Frels, Shervani, and Srivastava 2003; Johnson, Sohi, and Grewal 2004). The guidelines generated from these studies have contributed significantly to managers' ability to consider long-term customer profitability effects in firm-level managerial decision making.

In addition, articles published in *JM* have also influenced studies on similar topics published in other scholarly journals. Within these areas, the topics of customer profitability and the subsequent resource allocation decisions have been examined with respect to contractual (Allenby, Leone, and Jen 1999; Bolton 1998) and noncontractual

FIGURE 1
Triggers for a Resource-Conscious View



(Dwyer 1997) settings, a segment-based approach (Libai, Narayandas, and Humby 2002), acquisition and retention decisions (Blattberg and Deighton 1996; Blattberg, Getz, and Thomas 2001; Bolton, Lemon, and Verhoef 2004; Thomas, Reinartz, and Kumar 2004), and promotion expenditures (Berger and Bechwati 2001; Berger and Nasr 1998).

By 2004, the efficient allocation of resources had become a top focus of the academic and business communities, and the measures used to make such allocation decisions became critical in terms of their credibility and validity. The literature offered several measures designed to guide practitioners in the allocation of marketing resources. However, standard measures and metrics that explicitly linked to financial performance were missing. This dearth led to the initiation of the Boardroom Project in 2004. Comprising a cross-industry and cross-discipline body of influential marketing scientists, the Project was formed to establish marketing measurement standards for continuous improvement in business performance.

The Boardroom Project concluded that the discipline's next stage of evolution rests with marketing becoming a board-level strategic investment rather than being treated as a discretionary business expense. This conclusion later led to the establishment of the Marketing Accountability Standards Board in 2007 as an independent standards-setting body to ensure accountability and continuous improvements across all domains of marketing to enhance financial return. Currently, the Board is involved with several important projects that will have a significant impact on the discipline and the business community, such as the following: (1) the formulation of the Marketing Metric Audit Protocol, a formal process for connecting marketing activities to the financial performance of the firm; (2) measurement and improvements to the return from television advertising based on the Marketing Metric Audit Protocol; (3) identification of characteristics that make an "ideal" metric; and (4) establishment of generally accepted brand investment and valuation standards. As an advisor for the Marketing Accountability Standards Board, I can confidently say that such projects will contribute significantly in producing new

marketing knowledge and in bridging the gap between academia and the business community.

Marketing in the Corporate Boardrooms

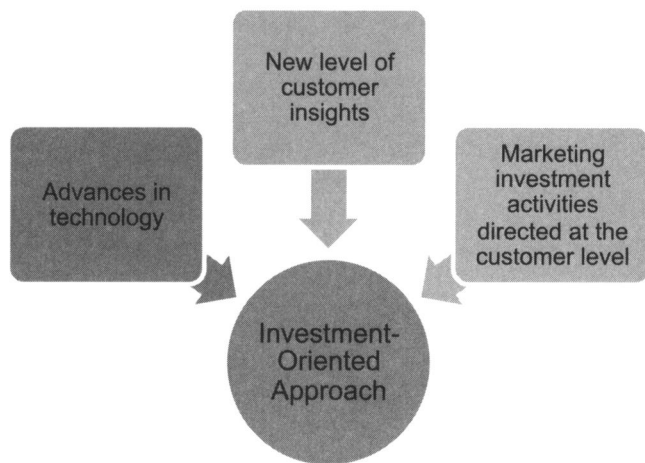
Beginning in 2005, the field expanded its investment-based outlook of marketing by bringing more accountability to marketing activities, consequently earning an important place in corporate boardrooms. In 2004, the CMO Council also called for marketing to become more accountable and to showcase the discipline's vitality in improving the firm's bottom line (CMO Council 2004). The need for such a focus is also reflected in the academic community's consistent calls for research attention (Rust, Ambler, et al. 2004; Sheth and Sisodia 2002; Srivastava and Reibstein 2005; Stewart 2009).

The need for research attention was further bolstered by the invitation of multidisciplinary research in marketing, accounting, and finance jointly announced by the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) and the Emory Brand Institute in 2007. The five key research areas identified through this exercise were (1) exploring the drivers of market value, (2) understanding brand valuation, (3) challenging the efficient market hypothesis, (4) understanding the investor community, and (5) evaluating recommendations of financial analysts. The selected papers were presented in the special interest conference titled "Marketing Strategy Meets Wall Street" and culminated in the November 2009 special issue of *JM* titled "Marketing Strategy and Wall Street: Nailing Down Marketing's Impact."

This call for research action has been answered by studies in *JM* that focus on key areas such as mergers and acquisitions (Bahadir, Bharadwaj, and Srivastava 2008; Homburg and Bucerius 2005; Swaminathan and Moorman 2009), firm performance (Krasnikov and Jayachandran 2008; Morgan and Rego 2009; O'Sullivan and Abela 2007; Ye, Marinova, and Singh 2007), firm value (Krasnikov, Jayachandran, and Kumar 2009; Rao and Bharadwaj 2008), the marketing-finance interface (Hanssens, Rust, and Srivastava 2009; Kumar and Shah 2009; Mantrala et al. 2007), and competitive advantage (Kumar et al. 2011; Vorhies and Morgan 2005). In retrospect, three factors triggered the expanded marketing focus to include an investment-based outlook, as Figure 2 illustrates.

The first trigger was technological progress in terms of sophisticated data management applications (e.g., Siebel, SAP, Salesforce). These applications varied in their complexity and the degree to which they could be integrated into the company's organizational infrastructure (Speier and Venkatesh 2002). Some popular technologies include electronic data interchange, spreadsheets, sales forecasting tools, inventory management tools, and content management systems (Hunter and Perreault 2007). These technologies enabled managers to gain timely access to customer, product inventory, and market intelligence data and thus respond to customer questions more quickly and with better information. In the business-to-business (B2B) setting, account managers who were focused on creating long-term relationships, rather than increasing sales transactions, identified a key benefit of these technologies.

FIGURE 2
Triggers for an Investment-Oriented Approach



Second, the advanced technologies have paved the way for a deeper level of insights than was possible previously. For example, an account manager can use the technology to form a special task-related team and adjust existing structures to address the specific requirements whenever new customer requests arise. Areas in which technology has helped refine marketing practices include customer profiling, customer acquisition and retention strategies, customized marketing messages, up-sell and cross-sell communications, and marketing promotions.

Third, these technological developments have eased the formulation of marketing activities directed at the customer level, which in turn has contributed to the investment-oriented approach. The technological advancements enabled managers to make decisions regarding customer behavior and company actions more easily. Specifically, marketing resources were directed toward customer acquisition, customer retention, and relationship-building efforts according to their value to the firm (Payne and Frow 2005). In effect, the marketing investments at the customer level led to a concerted focus on investment from a marketing standpoint. Marketing academia focused on this approach with several studies pertaining to, for example, market-based learning (Vorhies and Morgan 2005), transition from product/brand management to customer management (Sheth 2005), and migration from product portfolio management to customer portfolio management (Johnson and Selnes 2004). Indeed, *JM* ran a special section on customer relationship management in the October 2005 issue that covered relevant topics associated with the emerging investment-oriented approach.

The focus on marketing initiative accountability was also accompanied by a change from a product-centric philosophy (i.e., selling products to whomever is willing to buy) to a customer-centric marketing approach (i.e., developing a portfolio of valuable customers and serving their needs). Such a shift in philosophy highlighted the importance of nurturing profitable customer relationships and offering products that satisfy customer needs rather than driving product profitability and market share (Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007). This research area was also prominently

featured in *JM* through studies that focused on product features and functionality (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2008; Gill 2008), managing product returns (Bower and Maxham 2012; Petersen and Kumar 2009), product customization (Franke, Keinz, and Steger 2009; Moreau, Boney, and Herd 2011), and designing and offering ethical products (Kronrod, Grinstein, and Wathieu 2012; Lin and Chang 2012; Luchs et al. 2010; White, MacDonnell, and Ellard 2012).

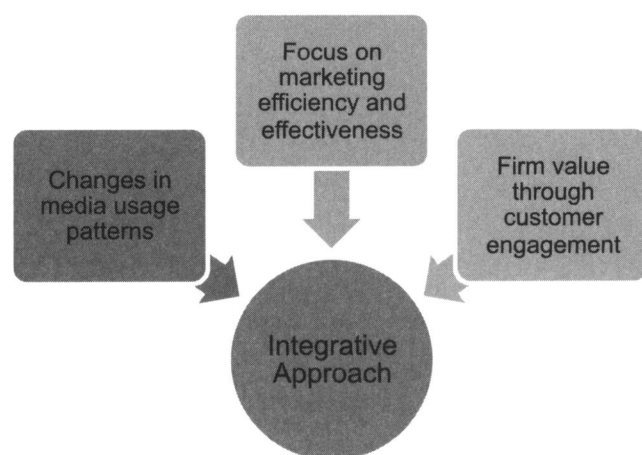
With the heightened emphasis on justifying marketing actions in financial terms, it is safe to say that marketing has turned a corner in terms of moving beyond merely being an expense item to being an investment variable. As a result, the field has attracted significant attention and has become elevated alongside other business functions with respect to accountability and performance. Furthermore, the customer-focused marketing approach has provided a definitive direction, thereby placing the discipline at the crossroads of finance, accounting, technology, and operations.

Marketing at the Helm

The emerging paradigm for marketing seems clear: it must be an integral part of the organization's decision-making framework. This calls for a complete integration of marketing activities with the other business functions and creates unique opportunities for marketing scholars whereby research studies must now consider not only the marketing function but also its interface with other business functions. As with the previous two phases, the emergence of this phase is also triggered by three developments. Figure 3 illustrates these triggers.

First, media usage patterns have undergone significant changes over the years. Specifically, the variations in customer preferences toward media channels have increased: people are spending more time on interactive media (interactive television, pure-play Internet and mobile services, and video games) than on traditional media (radio and print). This scenario has potential implications for ensuring organizational stability and resource allocation across the

FIGURE 3
Triggers for an Integrative Approach



channels because they can affect the revenue and cost functions of a business. More recently, social media has become a game changer in several industries. Its increasing prominence has influenced companies to increase their social media budgets to rapidly create or promote their brand through viral content, social media contests, and consumer engagement efforts. Furthermore, with social media sites now enabling businesses to gather statistics on the impact, reach, and progress of a product/service, the opportunity to gain insights on customer behavior, customer preferences, product penetration, and branding is tremendous.

The issue of using social media options has emerged primarily from social media's meteoric rise in usage within the relatively short time since it came into existence. Individuals and companies use social networks to communicate with (and within) one another. Furthermore, the merging of social networks and mobile devices has made it extremely easy and compelling for people to stay connected and, thus, influence one another's purchase decisions. Social networks have gained rapid momentum and adoption because of their ability to instantly identify and connect with users, their speed of communication, and their ease of use in influencing user experiences. Addressing the issue of social media usage is an important development for the field because the new media option represents a congregation point among not only users and companies but also the marketing, technology, and operations disciplines. Studies in this area can have a potentially significant impact on the future course of marketing.

The academic community has already begun to focus on issues relating to the nature and scope of social media usage. Recent research includes investigations on the impact of brand-related user-generated information in social media (Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian 2012), the linkages between user behavior on social media and search engines (Ghose, Ipeirotis, and Li 2012), the profitability of social coupon campaigns to businesses (Kumar and Rajan 2012), the net influence a user wields in a social network (Kumar et al. 2013), the use of viral marketing for marketing utilitarian products (Schulze, Schöler, and Skiera 2013), understanding user contribution in social media (Toubia and Stephen 2013), and the impact of social media influence on product choices (Wang, Aribarg, and Atchadé 2013).

Second, marketers are under increasing pressure to establish how marketing investments improve their company's bottom-line profits. This pressure extends to the demands of shareholders and chief financial officers, who want better accountability and documentation of the value added by the marketing function. In essence, there is a clear need to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing activities. This request from all quarters of the organization is due in part to previous marketing practices that focused on acquisition rather than retention, price rather than added value, and short-term transactions rather than the development of lasting, profitable relationships. Marketers need a management approach that encompasses increasing customer heterogeneity, addresses concerns about marketing accountability, puts available data to good use, and uses customer profitability as a key objective function.

Third, spurred by vibrant social media and the challenging marketing investment scenario, the emerging thought seems to be that customer engagement leads to sustained profits. To ascertain the value added by engagement efforts, it is important to identify, understand, and manage not only individual customers' purchase behavior but also their attitudes. In other words, beyond just encouraging customers to buy more intensively over time, it is critical to encourage them to (1) refer more people to buy products/services from the firm; (2) talk to other customers and prospects about the firm, consequently influencing them to transact with the firm; and (3) exchange information (in the form of customer feedback) with the firm. When this heightened state of customer engagement is effectively tracked and managed, firms will increase their profits (Kumar 2013).

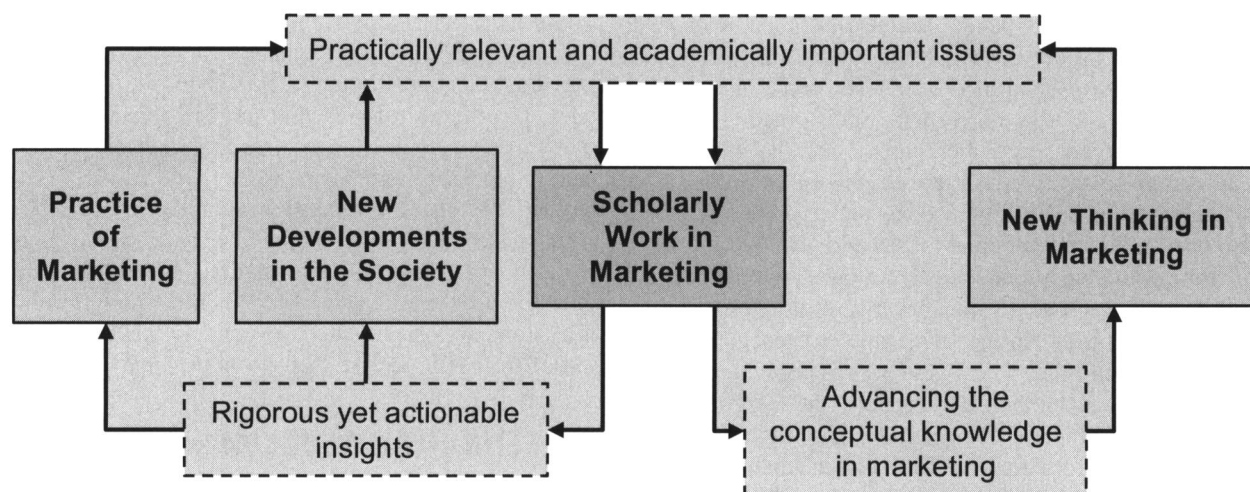
The Future of *JM* as I See It

From the aforementioned discussion of the evolution of themes, their corresponding triggers, and the wide range of topics covered, it is clear that these factors will continue to shape the course of the marketing discipline. Across the changes that have transpired thus far, the scholarly footprint is evident in the creation of new knowledge and in addressing practitioners' concerns. Going forward, I expect this phenomenon to become a more formalized cycle of furthering science and practice in marketing, as illustrated in Figure 4.

I predict that the practitioner community, the ongoing developments in society, and the new thinking in marketing at large will affect scholarly work in marketing such that issues from these three sources will continue to feed marketing scholars with ideas. Whereas the first two sources will foster empirical investigations in marketing, the third source will advance the conceptual knowledge in marketing and continue to expand the knowledge base.

For example, consider the range of recently published studies that originated from the practitioner community. These studies cover topics such as managing relationships with customers' customers in B2B markets (Homburg, Wilczek, and Hahn 2014), the effect of brand licensing on royalty rates (Jayachandran et al. 2013), understanding profitability patterns in multidyadic industrial channels (Dahlquist and Griffith 2014), understanding the conditions under which firms develop innovations that violate category norms (Barone and Jewell 2013), the value of multichannel customers (Kushwaha and Shankar 2013), and the level of technology usage in service encounters (Giebelhausen et al. 2014). These and other such studies not only address practitioner-relevant challenges but also ensure that the topics are of academic importance and merit formal enquiry. The emphasis on practitioner-focused problems is also evident in the regular hosting of academic-practitioner conferences such as Theory + Practice in Marketing and Marketing Strategy Meets Wall Street. In addition, the Gary L. Lilien ISMS-MSI Practice Prize serves as an incubator for studies that develop and implement marketing science concepts and methods that have a significant impact on the performance of organizations. Finally, the MSI Research Priorities also serve as an impetus for scholarly research that reflects marketplace challenges.

FIGURE 4
Future of Marketing Thought and Practice



Recent developments in society also affect scholarly work. Scholars keenly observe the marketing environment and undertake studies that help explain the new phenomena. A few recent examples of such studies include the role of brands and technology in long-distance family practices (Epp, Schau, and Price 2014), the role of culture in binational households (Cross and Gilly 2013), the value of middle-class consumers in emerging markets (Kravets and Sandikci 2014), the impact of recognition on charitable behavior (Winterich, Mittal, and Aquino 2013), corporate social responsibility in B2B markets (Homburg, Stierl, and Bornemann 2013), and the effect of environmentally sustainable new products on brand attitude (Olsen, Slotegraaf, and Chandukala 2014). Studies that fall under this category identify and explore the relevant and important issues among the latest societal developments that will continue to add to the knowledge base.

Alongside the empirical studies, conceptual articles create new knowledge in the marketing discipline. However, of late, the focus on conceptual articles has declined considerably, resulting in calls from within the community for more conceptual articles and marketing scholarship (Lutz 2011; MacInnis 2011; Yadav 2010). Despite the low interest, a few recent impactful conceptual articles have emerged that have significantly advanced our understanding about the topic and contributed to new thinking within the industry. A few examples focus on approaching customers' customers in B2B markets (Homburg, Wilczek, and Hahn 2014), the impact of uncertainty on marketing promotions and free gifts (Laran and Tsiros 2013), marketing doctrine for firm decision making (Challagalla et al. 2014), and marketing in computer-mediated environments (Yadav and Pavlou 2014). Studies that fall under this category explore marketing topics to uncover their various facets. This investigation and subsequent understanding lead to the advancement of the discipline and further new thinking.

As I see it, studies in these three categories continually provide us with new knowledge to further the discipline. Because *JM* has a great deal of scholarly influence and

practitioner focus, it is imperative that we look around us to identify and address the important issues with rigor and relevance. When the generated insights are actionable, a cyclical operation is set into motion that will help the academic community continue to advance the generation of new knowledge. This outlook, I believe, will be the path of least resistance to publication and knowledge creation.

Concluding Comments

The emerging paradigm of marketing's integrative approach and its importance in the growth of the discipline is but one phase that is indicative of the evolution process. There have been and will be several development phases that promise to shape the field of marketing. Research from recent years indicates a trend toward exploring the influence of new media. It is also evident that marketing as a discipline now occupies a much more central role in organizations. This elevated position provides the discipline new ways to expand its horizons and bring in interdisciplinary knowledge. Thus, it is crucial to understand that the interface of multiple business functions is beginning to radically change the way research is conducted, and it will continue to do so.

From the core marketing theories that have evolved over the past decades to the interdependencies with other factors such as accountability, investment decisions, technology needs, and operational guidance, researchers will have to understand that this trend is only going to mature in the coming years. Furthermore, with the advent of globalization and the challenges international markets present, the need of the hour is for the discipline (and *JM*) to be in perfect synchrony with this dynamic landscape and stay updated accordingly. In light of these changes, we must remain cognizant about the dynamics in the marketing environment—that is, look out for the questions that need to be answered and the issues that need to be solved—to empower ourselves with the knowledge we seek.

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