



Marketing's identity crisis: it's complicated

O. C. Ferrell¹

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Abstract

El-Ansary et al. (*AMS Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-017-0102-y>, 2017) provide a 100-year historical review of the concepts and paradigms that have led to an identity crisis in marketing. This commentary is a retrospective review, contributing to the understanding of the evolution of concepts and changes in the marketing discipline which have precipitated this identity crisis. In addition, progress in the development of marketing theory is examined to determine if there are major theories or frameworks that can assist in resolving the identity crisis. Concerns about the current narrow focus on consumer behavior, modeling, and methodological sophistication have resulted from the failure of the marketing discipline to determine appropriate research agenda and topics important in marketing education. A marketing systems paradigm is considered for resolving this identity crisis in academia and industry.

Keywords Marketing identity crisis · Marketing systems · Marketing history

Introduction

El-Ansary et al. (2017) provide a compelling argument that marketing has an identity crisis that is challenging both marketing education and academic research. These three accomplished, senior scholars engaged with many of those who were active in the three paradigms in marketing. (1) The Traditional Paradigm (late 1910s – late 1950s), (2) the macro-micro Paradigm Shift (late 1950s – late 1960s), and (3) the Broadening/Generic Boundary Expansion Paradigm (late 1960s – present) provide a foundation for their fourth paradigm based on marketing systems. Bartels (1974) developed stages of marketing by decade (1900–1970) that provide more detail and support for these first three established paradigm periods. The paradigms are also supported by “History of Marketing Education” (Ferrell et al. 2015). This commentary examines the contribution of El-Ansary et al. (2017), their argument that marketing has an identity crisis, and their support for a marketing systems paradigm going forward.

The three paradigms, along with the proposed fourth paradigm, provide an excellent foundation to explore substantive

conceptual areas today and to discuss the possible identity crisis. Exploring the identity crisis from the history of marketing perspective provides an opportunity to understand how marketing evolved and why we are discussing this identity crisis. It is important to analyze our historical roots and learn from the past to move forward and explore the future (Firat et al. 1987). The historical approach used here accomplishes this objective.

The identity crisis is at a crossroad as theory development in marketing is intersecting with new business models. Technologies enable new business platforms based on digital access, and these have changed the way firms conduct business and create value (Gatignon et al. 2017). The role of both buyers and sellers is changing from a general level to a more focused domain and in specific industries and business segments. Business model innovation involves the reengineering of organizational processes and the understanding of consumers who are driven by technology, value chains, and competitive considerations (Robertson 2017). As new business models are emerging, there is reflection on how existing conceptual frameworks fit into both research and practice. For example, Carpenter (2017) suggests future research on market orientation should move beyond a focus on the consumer and integrate the larger social system. Marketing's identity can be debated, but there appear to be many developments that present a new direction, one that includes how the various parts of marketing organizations interact with consumers to create a system that provides value. To better understand the

✉ O. C. Ferrell
ocf0003@auburn.edu

¹ Department of Marketing, Raymond J. Harbert College of Business, Auburn University, Auburn, AL, USA

opportunity for the future, it is good to examine the past and the present. There has been a failure to clearly define the current state of marketing's identity and the conceptual framework necessary for the future. This examination is important in understanding why the discipline has the current focus and why important areas in the marketing system are under-researched and are out of favor in marketing education and academic research.

Interest in marketing's identity crisis has been limited but has existed over the last 50 years. Kotler and Levy's (1969) "Broadening the Concept of Marketing" started the identity debate. By 1974 an article by Bartels, titled "The Identity Crisis in Marketing," was published in the *Journal of Marketing*. The debate continued with Firat et al. (1987) and more recently Kumar (2015). El-Ansary et al. (2017) describe the current state of the identity crisis and place it in perspective. I had the opportunity to be involved in contributing to this identity crisis debate and to personally engage with many of the participants in the debate. This commentary reflects on the identity crisis with an attempt to stimulate more discussion and research going forward. First, I will provide my perspective on the four paradigms.

The four paradigms: a retrospective

The four paradigms presented by El-Ansary et al. (2017) provide a solid foundation for reflecting on marketing's identity. A review of these paradigms provides an excellent historical understanding of how the marketing discipline evolved and why there is an identity crisis. The following sections provide a retrospective review and additional support for the four paradigms. Looking back at the early development of marketing has been lost in most doctoral programs. El-Ansary et al. (2017) and this commentary should be helpful in understanding marketing's development.

Paradigm one: traditional

There is almost complete agreement about the Traditional Paradigm (1910-late 1950s). Kumar (2015) defined this period as illuminating marketing principles and concepts and applied economics. Ferrell et al. (2015) define this as a "marketing in the economy theme," a macro-view with pre-occupation about productivity and efficiencies in the marketing system. Marketing and distribution were used almost interchangeably with one of the first marketing-related courses, Distributive and Regulatory Industries of the United States, taught at the University of Michigan in 1902. Arch Shaw (1912) "viewed marketing as demand stimulation and physical distribution." Until the 1950s, marketing focused on commodities, institutions, and functions (Hollander 1997).

During the first paradigm, the commodity school of thought focused on product types and classification systems. Contributions important to the historical roots of the commodity school include D.H. Weld's 1916 *The Marketing of Farm Products*. He incorporated elements of institutional and functional approaches to understanding marketing (Weld 1916). Classification of products became a major theme (Aspinwall 1958; Copeland 1924). Today the focus has shifted to thinking of a product not as just a good but as a service or idea, but commodity marketing is still used as a framework for marketing strategy (Ferrell et al. 2014). These early foundations of marketing related to commodities, institutions, and functions are still imbedded in the fabric of marketing education.

The institutional school of marketing thought focused on retailers, wholesalers, and other agencies that influence marketing (Bartels 1976). The institutional approach paved the way for examining and understanding how the functions of marketing are used by intermediaries in the supply chain, and it is still important in understanding marketing today. As noted by Jones and Monieson (1987), the institutional approach is the foundation of the study of public policy and marketing. A stakeholder view or orientation describes various stakeholders from an institutional perspective. This approach does not view marketing from a functional perspective or systems framework (Vargo and Lusch 2017).

Part of the identity crisis is the current attempt to deemphasize foundational functions of a marketing system. The elements of physical distribution, purchasing, wholesaling, retailing, transportation, inventory management, packaging, and materials handling can be found in the supply chain management discipline (Hult et al. 2014). These elements of traditional marketing are not the focus of the marketing discipline today.

Paradigm two: macro to micro shift

The macro to micro paradigm shift (late 1950s – late 1960s) moved away from functions, institutions, and commodities to marketing as organized behavior systems (Alderson 1957; Alderson 1965). This resulted in a focus of marketing management and marketing strategy (Kelley and Lazer 1958). It also created the need to understand consumers. George Katona (1951), one of the early contributors to behavioral economics, published *Psychological Analysis of Economic Behavior* (1951). Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell published a consumer behavior textbook in 1968, which was the first marketing textbook on consumer behavior. The consumer behavior sub-discipline in marketing research was elevated by the Howard and Sheth (1969) *Theory of Buyer Behavior*. This new research area in marketing continues to advance today and has become the largest area of research and academic scholar identification.

Marketing's role in the firm continues to be challenged as business models evolve. Academic marketing, however, is slow to change, with research often not reflecting the changes in marketing practice. Online marketing for firms such as Amazon is using disruptive technologies to change the practice of marketing. The sharing economy business model is changing the lodging and transportation business models. While the view that marketing management and strategy are important, marketing activities are now often performed by other functional areas, such as finance, production, and information technology. Hult and Ketchen (2017) define disruptive marketing strategy as marketing activities that are first accepted and applied in a marketing department or function, then moved across the firm's internal departments/functions, then finally connected with external firms and stakeholders to deliver market-based value creation. They position market orientation viewed as implementing the marketing concept as a disruptive marketing strategy. If marketing permeates all aspects of an organization, then marketing moves out of the marketing department and the function is cross-company focused (Hult and Ketchen 2017). If this analysis is correct, then marketing functions may move to a number of other departments, and this contributes to identity loss for marketing.

Paradigm three: the broadening/generic boundary

The broadening paradigm expanded the scope of marketing knowledge to achieve any organization's cause or individual's goals. This expansion resulted in marketing as a tool or skill set for doing good. Often doing good was identified as corporate social responsibility or benefiting external stakeholders. This opened the door for research on topics related to social issues, sustainability, consumer protection, and legal and regulatory issues. Kotler and Zaltman (1971) and Kotler (1972) expanded the domain of marketing to all human relationships. This focus resulted in applying marketing knowledge, by using these concepts, in any social relationship or societal issue. As marketing techniques and skills were being expanded, the broader focus was now on making marketing transferable to services, persons, and ideas (Kotler and Levy 1969). Marketing became everything where there is a transaction or exchange of values between two parties (Kotler 1972) in all human interactions. An important contribution is this generic concept of marketing applying to all publics. This means Kotler was identifying a stakeholder orientation before it became popular 20 years later. The 2018 AMA call for papers is titled "Integrating Paradigms in a World Where Marketing is Everywhere." The positioning of the call for papers brings together perspectives, approaches, and even fields that are outside marketing. Marketing touches everything and can take more ownership of this today.

This conference theme supports the view that the Broadening/Generic Boundary Expansion Paradigm is the dominant focus of marketing today. But I would argue that the methodological rigor used in consumer behavior research applied to any topic involving human behavior is the best way to describe how paradigm three has evolved. Paradigm three provides support that the domain of marketing is more of a behavioral science. It is not based on a general systems theory of markets, but is based on wholes, relationship processes, and patterns as suggested by Vargo et al. (2017).

Kotler and Levy's (1969) "Broadening the Concept of Marketing" created the debate over the identity of marketing. While Bagozzi (1974) contributed by expanding marketing as an organized behavior system of exchange, others (Luck 1969, 1974) questioned expanding the boundaries of marketing too far. Ferrell and Perrachione (1980) expressed concern that if marketing becomes indistinguishable from other disciplines it may not survive and maintain its identity. After a number of articles debating the identity issue, the idea that all exchange is marketing appeared to win the most support (Nickels 1974). Courses and teaching materials for social marketing and marketing for nonprofit organizations emerged to implement the broadened concept of marketing (Kotler et al. 1983).

Bagozzi's (1974) "Social Exchange as Marketing" and Bagozzi's (1977) "Formal Theory of Marketing Exchanges" contributed to disrupting marketing's identity established in paradigm one and paradigm two. Viewing marketing as exchange, including broadening/generic marketing, (Kotler and Levy 1969; Kotler 1972) simply expanded awareness that marketing concepts and tools are used in all types of organizations. Bagozzi's theory of marketing exchange went beyond an organization and a consuming public to include the valuable stakeholders, who are an important part of later marketing theories. The debates over broadening marketing were useful in understanding the nature and scope of marketing and reinforced the importance of marketing as a discipline.

Paradigm four: the systems approach

El-Ansary et al.'s (2017) proposed fourth paradigm includes both buyers and sellers as part of the marketing system. Alderson (1965) focused on buyers and sellers in an organized behavior system. In addition, Vargo and Lusch (2004) support the buyer-seller co-creation of value in their service-dominant logic that focused on a marketing-grounded exchange to provide value for buyers, sellers, and stakeholders. Marketing is not just about one side of exchange; it involves knowledge about consumers and the creation of a system that includes the behavior of sellers and buyers while operating the marketing systems with reciprocal interaction. If the identity of marketing becomes more narrow and focused

on consumer behavior, will there be a practicality for marketing education and marketing practice?

Alderson and Green (1964) used a systems framework to approach planning and problem solving in marketing from a firm perspective. Marketing systems are positioned as providing the blueprint for action. Rooted in the system are both normative possibilities as well as descriptive issues such as the marketing system and leadership related to experiences, cases, and efficiency studies. Feedback systems and response to the environment are considered important. Alderson and Green's (1964) chapter one, "System and Leadership," positions the behavior of the marketing system within a firm as related to performance. Marketing programs are the primary output of the marketing system. In Alderson and Green (1964) chapter 20, "Designing Marketing Systems," the primary tool is viewed as cost analysis for products and customers. Examining sales by segments of the business, functional cost groups and allocation of overhead, sales revenue is important to the performance the system. A distinction between effort variables and response variables is most important. The Alderson and Green (1964) approach to systems from the viewpoint of the individual firm provides a link to suppliers and customers, but following a total systems approach is positioned as sensitive to all the stakeholders. It is interesting that a complete practical guide for a systems paradigm for the firm was available over 50 years ago. Many of the research themes important in marketing today such as marketing efficiency and effectiveness, investment activities directed at the customer level, resource allocation efforts, accountability, and customer centricity (Kumar 2015) can be found in the firm marketing system described by Alderson and Green (1964).

Support for a systems approach to marketing has had continuous support over the last 50 years. Fisk (1967) wrote a principles of marketing textbook *Marketing Systems: An Introductory Analysis*. The market at the time found the 4P framework an easier way to teach the principles course. An essay by Holbrook (2003), "Adventures in Complexity," positioned chaos as a phenomenon wherein systems composed of interrelated parts or interdepartmental agents following regular rules of behavior generate outcomes and feedback that is nonlinear and unpredictable. His essay provides support for a system paradigm based on the dynamic processes, adaptation, and performance of organizations.

More recently Vargo et al. (2017) provide a systems perspective on markets. While Alderson (1965) used a firm perspective of systems, Vargo et al.'s approach is to build a macro system of markets. They proceed to build a theory that corresponds to the business environment and could be formulated into a research agenda. The systems definitions are similar to the foundations of others based on parts to wholes, objects to relationships, and from structures to processes (Vargo et al. 2017). They make an important contribution related to the

relationship of systems to ethical, social, and other environmental variables. In addition, they relate co-creation of value (Vargo and Lusch 2004) with the vanishing boundaries between participants that create markets.

Progress in theory development

According to Bartels (1962), the earliest theories relevant to marketing thought came from applied economics which provided more empirical and descriptive concepts related to marketing issues. Early marketing theory focused on the nature of the market, the meaning of value, the role of production, government relationships, the consumer, social and technological change, enlargement of the market, conditions of production, new social problems, and the economic environment of laissez-faire and the new order. In other words, while marketing today appears to focus extensively on the behavioral sciences, earlier marketing theory focused on applied economics (Tamilia 2011). Applied economics was the predecessor to the behavioral sciences.

The history of marketing thought and theory was once a key unifying course for doctoral students. The golden age for a focus on marketing theory as a framework for research was roughly from the 1960s to the 1980s. During this period, marketing theory courses were a part of most doctoral curriculums (Tamilia 2011). In the golden age of marketing thought and theory, a number of volumes confirm the interest of marketing scholars (Cox et al. 1964; Fisk 1971; Ferrell et al. 1979; Bartels 1962, 1976, 1988; Sheth et al. 1988). In the last two decades of the twentieth century, there were occasionally sessions on marketing theory at the AMA and AMS conferences (Stone and Gardner 1989).

If marketing has an identity issue, then it is important to review theory development in the last 25 years with the potential to provide a foundation for research and knowledge development. The major conceptual foundation to drive research in marketing strategy has been market orientation. Narver and Slater (1990) and Jaworski and Kohli (2017) provided leadership in making market orientation a major focus when investigating substantive, theoretical and methodological issues related to marketing strategy (Varadarajan 2017). Hunt (2000) made a significant impact, developing resource-advantage theory and a general theory of competition. Lusch and Vargo (2006) made a significant contribution to marketing theory with a service-dominant logic for marketing. These three conceptual foundations contributed to advancing research in marketing strategy during the 25 years that interest in marketing strategy was declining in doctoral programs.

First, market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Kohli et al. 1993) probably had more impact on marketing strategy than any other construct. The research and the body of literature on this topic continues to grow. Hult and Ketchen

(2017) view this as a disruptive conceptual framework that permeates all aspects of an organization, even a boundary-spanning phenomenon connecting multiple firms. Sett (2017) sees three dimensions of market orientation including sensing opportunities and threats, seizing opportunities and/or guarding against threats, and reconfiguring resources based on a dynamic environment. Carpenter (2017) points out that marketing orientation focuses on completeness. According to Sett (2017), while market orientation provides evidence of how marketing orientation effects performance, marketing practice needs more than organizational culture (Narver and Slater 1990) and processes (Kohli and Jaworski 1990). It is possible that emerging research on business models may provide a broader conceptual foundation embracing multiple domains, interconnecting parts of the organization to achieve strategic objectives and performance. Market orientation could be a key component of the business model.

In the 1990s, Hunt set a new course, developing a resource-advantage theory in marketing. This new theory was considered “interdisciplinary, evolutionary, and a disequilibrium-provoking theory of competition” (Hunt 2000, xiii). The result was dozens of articles by Hunt and a 2000 book entitled *A General Theory of Competition: Resources, Competences, Productivity, Economic Growth*. Resource-advantage theories have been applied to many areas of marketing, including marketing strategy, sustainability, and ethics. Hunt’s (2010) *Marketing Theory: Foundations, Controversy, Strategy, Resource-Advantage Theory* combined his previous concern with the nature of marketing and science, including the foundations of marketing theory, with a general marketing theory. This general marketing theory resulting in resource advantage was termed theory of competition. Hunt acknowledges the contributions of Alderson’s functionalist theory of marketing processes in developing his general theory of competition. Hunt applied resource-advantage to market segmentation strategy, competence-based strategy, industry-based strategy, market orientation, knowledge-based strategy, relationship-marketing strategy, brand-equity strategy, and sustainability.

Hunt (2017) addresses marketing’s identity problem by specifying how resource-advantage theory has the potential to: (1) specify the domain, (2) define marketing’s central concept as strategy, (3) provide and ground the foundational premises of marketing, (4) posit its fundamental explananda, (5) ground major theories in marketing strategy, and (6) identify fundamental strategies and illustrate how these strategies promote social welfare. Hunt positions resource-advantage theory, not only as resolving strategic marketing’s identity problem, but also as distinguishing strategic marketing from strategic management. It addresses both positive and negative impacts of strategy on society. Still left to resolve is the question of how to encourage the marketing discipline to embrace resource-advantage theory and use it as a foundational theory for academic marketing research.

In the twenty-first century, a significant contribution to marketing theory resulted from an article by Vargo and Lusch (2004) titled “Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing” that was published in the *Journal of Marketing*. The key to the new dominant logic for marketing revolves around service as opposed to the more common reference, services. “Service implies a process—applying operant resources for the benefit of another entity—whereas services implies units of output and therefore reflects the goods-dominant logic” (Lusch and Vargo 2006, p. xvii). The exchange of specialized competences and skills helps to create value. This theory represented a conceptual foundation for marketing education and research. Lusch and Vargo (2006) advocated for a service-dominant definition of marketing that viewed marketing as not only an organizational process but also as a societal process with an emphasis on voluntary exchange and collaborative relationships in which stakeholders are able to “obtain value by the application of complementary resources” (pp. xvii-xviii). Lusch and Vargo’s framework was not necessarily new, but their conceptualization was embraced by marketing scholars. Therefore, Lusch and Vargo (2006) contributed toward advancing marketing theory, and the service-dominant approach positioned there has the potential to be a disruptive strategy that could influence the entire firm and its stakeholders.

Discussion: marketing’s identity disruption

There are many leading scholars concerned that marketing has lost its focus, and there is confusion about marketing as a discipline and about its contribution to organizations, stakeholders and society. Houston (2016) provides a strong defense of the identity crisis and a failure of the marketing discipline to embrace the traditional and macro-micro paradigms topic with the question, “Is strategy a dirty word?” As Houston (2016) points out, the proportion of doctoral fellows at the AMA Sheth Foundation Doctoral Consortium who self-identity as having marketing-strategy careers has declined nearly by half over the last 20 years. In the survey of 2017 “Who Went Where” for the American Marketing Association Doc Sig Group, 63% took jobs with a major research area in consumer behavior and modeling, only 28% identified marketing strategy as their major area, and only 9% identified sales, ethics, innovations, sales management, and entrepreneurship as their research area (Trivedi et al. 2017). This provides evidence that the identity of marketing has shifted from paradigms one and two, and possibly paradigm three has been embraced but is not driving contributions to knowledge. In fact, paradigm three, the broadening/generic boundary expansion defined in late 1960 – present, is no longer a major research area. A new paradigm is emerging that moves marketing further away from the third paradigm, as El-Ansary et al. (2017) describe.

Reibstein et al. (2009) believe marketing has little to say about strategic issues. They believe marketing has a tactical perspective focused lower in the organization. They say that “balkanization of academic marketing into quantitative modeling and consumer behavior has diminished research on strategic marketing issues” (p. 1). If both behavior and quantitative approaches are needed to solve marketing problems, a systems perspective should be useful to bridge academic silos. Reibstein et al. (2009) suggest some core domains that should bring greater relevance to research agendas: (1) more societal concerns, social responsibility, and ethics; (2) innovative use of resources to create values and profitable growth; (3) dynamic resource allocation to create insight and accountability; and (4) new market space including new media and marketing channels. New market space relates to new business models such as online retailing, the sharing economy, and emerging technology in supply chains addressed from a strategic perspective. Finally, Reibstein et al. (2009) suggest rigor and relevance in doctoral programs and research to address practitioner issues with journals soliciting articles that are relevant. Nine years after Reibstein et al. (2009) questioned the focus of marketing, Steenkamp (2018) also suggests that we are still moving away from synergy and fostering balkanization of our research and marketing departments. He believes we are witnessing a bifurcation in the marketing discipline between “behavioral” and “quantitative/managerial.” In addition, many PhD programs may be too heavy on methods and too light on marketing theory. Steenkamp (2018) suggests “doing research that is academically rigorous but also managerially relevant” (p. 171).

McAlister (2016) suggests that academic marketers are becoming methodologists. She is concerned that methodological sophistication, instead of the importance of marketing strategy, has resulted in a psychological and quantitative focus. This is supported by major journal articles that provide advancement of knowledge in the marketing discipline. As Yadav (2010) points out, this concern for methodological vigor and the failure to appreciate the role of theory development in marketing has contributed to a decline in marketing knowledge. Hunt (2010) indicates that doctoral seminars in marketing theory are in serious decline, and probably less than six doctoral programs include seminars on the history of marketing thought. All of these changes have contributed to a lost identity of marketing as a discipline related to the three paradigms.

Kumar (2015) believes that it is crucial for the marketing discipline to provide new knowledge and thought that will have a lasting effect on both academicians and practitioners. He develops stages in the evolution of marketing thought and practice, and he points out that the ease of data collection has moved the discipline to use sophisticated empirical techniques to capture individual custom data. His stages of evolution over

the last 20 years indicate themes of customer profitability, marketing accountability, advances and innovation in technology, and changes in media usage patterns (Kumar 2015). In other words, we have become data driven with a focus on consumer behavior. This is far removed from paradigms one and two, and there is no indication that the broadening marketing theme in paradigm three is driving the discipline today. With new doctoral students focusing on consumer behavior and modeling, it becomes clear that interest in traditional, managerial, and broadening the boundaries of marketing research is vanishing from the marketing discipline. This is creating an identity crisis and much tension in our discipline. Traditional topics, such as sales, sales management, supply chain management, retailing, pricing, advertising, and product management are moving into other departments, often outside the business school. With fewer conceptual and theoretical articles in major journals, there are fewer marketing conceptual frameworks to justify the empirical focus of the discipline. This has caused most theories to support a micro-consumer quantitative analysis paradigm coming from the behavioral sciences, not the marketing discipline. Theories in psychology, sociology, and anthropology are being used to explain consumer phenomena. This approach to marketing results in a focus on just one side of Bagozzi’s (1977) theory of marketing exchanges that includes both buyers and sellers.

In the introduction to *Philosophical and Radical Thought in Marketing*, Firat et al. (1987) indicate that an applied discipline, like marketing, requires practical utility for one segment of society, and for marketing it has been the managerial segment. Also, marketing as a discipline should support the logic of the practicality of the market system. In addition, they suggest that the discipline of consumer behavior is a spin-off from marketing. Consumer behavior opens itself to all consumption behavior and experiences and enters the realm of all human behavior (Firat et al. 1987). Marketing is at a crossroad, with the disciplines of marketing and consumer behavior needing a deconstruction to create a reconstruction that questions existing theories. These views were expressed 30 years ago. Since that time, there has been a major deconstruction of the marketing discipline, and the reconstruction has led to an increased focus on consumer behavior and modeling in academic research. There is less focus on theory development and more focus on methodological rigor. During this time period, supply chain has often moved to other academic departments or reorganized as a new department. The topics in supply chain, such as logistics, purchasing, and operations (quality standards, cost analysis, etc.), were among the activities that were highly visible in paradigm one (Hult et al. 2014). In paradigm one, most marketing departments taught courses such as logistics, purchasing, transportation, wholesaling, retailing, and industrial marketing.

“Supply Chain Management has come into its own as a distinct discipline, which partly explains why there are more

stand-alone supply chain departments and programs. In industry, ‘Chief Supply Chain Officer’ is becoming a recognized C-Suite title. In business schools, employers are demanding graduates with skill sets that are aligned with supply chain management capabilities. Recruiters are seeking out schools with supply chain programs to fill a significant talent gap in the field,” according to Elizabeth Davis-Sramek, Associate Professor of Supply Chain Management, Auburn University. If Hult and Ketchen’s (2017) disruptive marketing strategy process plays out, it is possible that changes in business models may result in supply chain management moving across internal departments and to outside firms and stakeholders to create a value chain. Supply chain management may replace marketing’s current leadership role in firms.

In reality, supply chain management has become its own discipline, taking with it a part of what used to be marketing. This happened as marketing was being reconstructed by a focus on consumer behavior. While this reconstruction has provided significant knowledge, it is less related to the field of marketing practice. Recruiters do not come to marketing departments looking for undergraduates in consumer behavior, but recruit in more popular areas such as sales, retailing, operations, and supply chain management. This means that marketing’s academic research focus, in many cases, has drifted away from the types of jobs, responsibilities, and undergraduate students for which the majority of organizations recruit. While the MBA provides a strategy focus, many of the courses in strategy are found in management departments. All of these developments have contributed to the identity crisis in marketing. Revisiting the proposal of Firat et al. (1987) that an applied discipline, like marketing, requires practical utility for at least one segment in society challenges us to identify that segment. Possibly we have broken out of “the reasoning and traditional practices of the marketing discipline” (Firat et al. 1987). If this is true, then what should the marketing discipline be in the future? If the focus is on human behavior and methodological rigor, do we belong in the business school?

Conclusion: where will marketing go when the volcano blows?

Marketing’s identity crisis is complicated. The landscape of marketing is being reshaped, similar to how the eruption of a volcano can reshape a mountain’s summit. Some parts of marketing have moved on to other disciplines; and other areas, like sales, are being pushed aside to focus more on methodology, psychological issues, and quantitative rigor. Practitioners may start looking to other disciplines to assist with innovation, planning, and problem-solving. Marketing needs to be relevant to organizational decision makers.

The identity crisis in marketing provides opportunity to understand why it exists and to engage marketing scholars to contribute to understanding and resolving the identity crisis. El-Ansary et al. (2017) made an excellent defense that paradigm three does not meet Hunt’s (1976) three criteria for theory: logical set of propositions, law-like generalizations, and being empirically testable. Because of the anomalies and identity issues from “marketing as everything” in paradigm three, the marketing systems paradigm four has the potential to provide foundation to view marketing from a more holistic perspective. The systems paradigm has been developed to explain both micro and macro marketing phenomena. Alderson and Green (1964) use micro systems framework of the firm for normative and descriptive planning and problem solving in marketing. More recently, Vargo et al. (2017) use a systems theory perspective on marketing and a research agenda.

Kennedy (2017) sees systems thinking and systems theory as minimizing future fragmentation in macro-social marketing research. Social marketing considers many stakeholders as it addresses social issues, interrelationships, and networks. Systems theory can be used to map parts and processes to understand their consequences on society. Kennedy (2017) believes “fragmented views within macro-social marketing threaten to divide the field” (p. 347). Therefore, macro-social marketing appears to experience the same identity crisis as other areas of the discipline. This call for systems theory thinking and theory to guide philosophy, methodology, and methods seems consistent with the El-Ansary et al. (2017) call for a new paradigm based on a general marketing systems theory of marketing.

A marketing perspective on business models (Gatignon et al. 2017) to address changes in technologies such as digital platforms is also compatible with systems theory. Business models can be used in understanding marketing variables and functions that play a key role in conceptualizing the field (Robertson 2017). In addition, a dynamic approach to business models can provide an adaptive way to understand marketing contexts and business system networks (Nyström and Mustonen 2017). The advantage of both a systems framework and a business model framework is to understand all of the complex parts of marketing that are necessary for a successful strategy.

It is important to examine marketing theory in the context of history, especially as it allows us to take a more macro approach to the marketing discipline. Tamilia (2011) argues that over time, the advancement of certain theories over others led to “fragmentation and specialization of our discipline into narrow subfields...losing sight of both its history and of its past thought leaders and contributions” (p. 2). Critical marketing studies center on the issue of contextualization. Historically-informed critical marketing studies spotlight institutions, participants, and scholarly writings that contributed to advancing “marketing theory, thought and practice that

reflect multiple constellations of interests” (Tadajewski 2012, p. 440).

Past contributions to theory development provide a solid foundation for marketing’s identity. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) stimulated both theory and research on marketing orientation as a strategy for the firm. Hunt (2000) provided a resource-advantage theory that could be applied to understanding and decisions in the marketing system. Lusch and Vargo (2006) advanced service-dominant logic conceptualization of marketing as a social process and also as compatible with a systems framework of marketing. While there may be an identity crisis in marketing, the continuing development of theories and frameworks serves to unify the discipline. There is an opportunity to recognize the importance of avoiding narrow fragmentation in marketing. A holistic marketing identity, based on systems thinking and systems theory, could advance the discipline.

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