



There could be more to marketing than you might have thought! An invited paper, by Professor Roger Layton



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ABSTRACT

Is marketing a management technology, a societal provisioning system, or the study of seller and buyer decision processes in increasingly complex contexts, or could it be repositioned as a discipline within the social sciences? Could repositioning avert the growing fragmentation of marketing scholarship? Would it open up new opportunities for significant research in and between these different ways of seeing our discipline? And would perhaps the right repositioning engage marketing with adjacent social sciences in explorations opening up new fields of research, influencing management choice and public policy in the challenges human communities face at all levels? One possible positioning that offers a positive response to these questions is to assert, "Marketing is the study of value co-creation through voluntary economic choice made in exchanges among individuals and entities in and between human communities." This positioning includes studies in manager and customer choice, work in societal provisioning systems in communities at any and all levels of development, and the growing interests in culture and communication. Links with anthropology, archaeology, history, sociology and economics are then explored. Drawing on empirical work in marketing and in adjacent disciplines the core elements of a dynamic theory of evolutionary change in exchange networks and marketing systems are identified, providing a possible starting point for an exploration of the marketing response to the difficult and complex challenges faced by human communities across the world.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

市场营销是一种管理技术、一种社会供给系统、对买卖双方在日益复杂的情形下的决策流程研究，抑或是可以重新定位为社会科学内的一项学科呢？再定位能否避免市场营销学知识的不断碎片化？它是否会为我们审视学科的不同方法间进行重要研究提供新的机会？另外，正确的重新定位或可将市场营销与相关社会科学相连接，在人类社会各个层次上所面临的挑战中探究新的研究领域、影响管理选择和公共政策？一个可能会对这些问题带来积极回应的定位是主张：“市场营销是对人类社会个体和实体之间的自愿经济交换选择带来的价值共创的研究。”这一定位包括对经理和客户抉择、在各发展层级的社会中的社会供给系统中工作，以及对文化和交流的不断增长的兴趣的研究。因而可探究人类学、考古学、历史学、社会学以及经济学与之的关系。借鉴市场营销及相关学科方面的实证研究，找出了交易网络和市场营销系统中革命性变化变动理论的核心要素，为探索以市场营销的方式应对全世界人类社会所面对的困难而复杂的挑战提供了一个潜在起点。

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1. Introduction

Is marketing a management technology, a societal provisioning system, or the study of seller and buyer decision processes in increasingly complex contexts, or ... or should it, first of all, be thought of as a discipline within the social sciences? Questions such as these

have been asked before, often reflecting unease as to the future direction of marketing; how marketing could and should be perceived by business and the community at large; whether it was something that could best be taught at a vocational level or needed higher level teaching and research; whether perhaps it should be defined by a specific context such as agricultural, international, developing country or FMCG marketing; and how it differed from economics and related social sciences. These and similar questions were all important at the time, with different answers emerging in different parts of the world, reflecting contemporary economic, political and cultural imperatives.

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2. Context is crucial

Today, these imperatives are again asserting themselves in very different forms and the questions about marketing need to be considered once more. What would best position marketing scholars to contribute to immediate challenges such as these: ice or drug epidemics in country towns; building sustainable communities in remote outback regions; helping migrant camps to evolve into viable communities; contributing marketing-based insights into the debates about gun control; managing the impacts of disruptive technologies such as Uber and Airbnb; blending market and state-based facilities to meet the health needs of an ageing population; improving quality of life for the 20% or so who live below the “bottom of the pyramid”; locating, for tax purposes, value creation in multinational multi-country enterprises; building resilience into markets such as housing or finance; and many, many other pressing issues. For the most part we have tended to ignore these and similar issues, preferring to concentrate on what we thought we knew best – managing enterprise marketing in the world’s growth economies – with relatively little concern for externalities arising from enterprise marketing. It is these externalities that lie at the centre of many of the issues we now face.

For 50 or more years this has served us well, but I suggest we now need to rethink our positioning. This is indeed happening, as marketing agendas are widening and deepening. The 2015 ANZMAC agenda, for example, highlighted interest in service marketing, the impacts of innovation and technological change, macromarketing, social marketing, consumer culture theory, and many other aspects of marketing. The danger now is that the field of marketing will fragment into a number of increasingly separate sub-fields, each responding to a narrowly defined range of interests with often very specific methodologies. While the pressures of academic scholarship may favour this outcome, it is also likely that it will restrict our capacity to respond in a holistic manner to the kinds of challenges we now face. This dilemma is becoming increasingly acute.

3. Reframing marketing

The purpose of this brief paper is to suggest that a reframing of marketing as a major discipline within the social sciences might, by identifying a core set of social phenomena common to all (or most) of the existing and emerging sub-fields, integrate them in a search for relevant knowledge and understanding, providing the setting and contexts for the holistic approaches that will be needed in the future, increasing the likelihood that marketing scholars and scholarship will have a recognisably stronger role to play in contributing to debates around solutions.

What could then be the core set of social phenomena identified with marketing? I suggest that something like this might be a place to start. *Marketing is the study of value co-creation through voluntary economic choice made in exchanges among individuals and entities in and between human communities.* Creating economic and, in many situations, social value, through the voluntary exchange of goods, services, experiences and ideas, based on a blend of self-interest and altruism, has been a primary interest of human communities for nearly 10,000 years and remains so today. It can be seen in the subsistence marketplaces of countries such as India, in the struggles of remote communities across the world, in the trade routes linking communities across continents and oceans, in the supermarkets and shopping malls in developed and developing nations, and in the black and/or informal markets that appear after economic, political or environmental crisis.

The evolutionary sequences that flow from this focus on the voluntary exchange of goods, services, experiences and ideas in widely disparate human communities, from pre-history to contemporary Western economies, have much in common, providing an empiri-

cal anchor for the development of theory in marketing. Looking back through history and across differing human communities, subsistence marketplaces are the order of the day, and it is here, I suspect, that we should start in identifying the core set of social phenomena of interest to marketing seen as a social discipline.

It does not of course stop there. In many of these subsistence marketplaces further evolutionary change is often stymied through inability to generate investable cash surpluses from everyday activity, together with traditional and institutional rigidities. Where change does occur, the outcome for a community is often a complex fuzzy blend of informal and formal exchange practices, where fortune favours success and political and competitive power becomes increasingly important. Inequality grows, enterprises form, often failing but sometimes succeeding beyond the participants wildest dreams, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps; value co-creating investments in tangible and intangible infrastructure are made, initiating and facilitating voluntary economic exchange. At this point, exchange networks and managerial practices become increasingly sophisticated, property rights and legal regulation change into carefully specified institutional rules; widening and deepening flows of ownership, possession, finance, risk and information demand careful, insightful management. This is the world of contemporary marketing.

In many countries each of these stages co-exist in many communities, a situation that challenges conventional marketing thought that has been largely preoccupied with the developed world. Are the managerial and policy insights generated by these studies applicable to each of the earlier stages often present in many communities, and if not, just what is the extent of their applicability? Responding to questions such as these I believe we need a deep understanding of the way human communities interact in co-creating economic and social value through exchange, and of the causal dynamics producing evolutionary change in the resulting exchange networks. It is only on the basis of this generalised understanding that we can provide widely applicable managerial and policy insights. Although I cannot be sure, I suspect that no other social science has this specific focus.

While evidence of these evolutionary sequences comes from many different disciplines in the social and physical sciences, it is the insights provided by 100 years or more of marketing that provide our start. If we are to consider the possibility of marketing in this wider sense, we need as [Hunt \(2002\)](#) suggests clear evidence of the existence of empirical regularities across this wider frame of reference. For nearly 100 years, marketing scholars have been working to identify pattern and structure in the choices facing both sellers and buyers as they interact in value creating economic exchange.

Examples of the studies that come to mind include wide-ranging work on organisational structure interacting with management style and strategy in response to environmental change; insights into resource advantage and competitive strategy; careful, detailed analyses of the processes underlying value co-creation in exchange; studies of B2B exchange networks; work on new product introduction and product life cycles; flows of information within and between communities; studies of bargaining and price formation in a variety of settings; segmentation studies and linked response offers by sellers to buyers; power and politics in channels of distribution; the changing patterns and dynamics of retailing over time; the statistical regularities found in patterns of consumer buying behaviour; studies of consumer culture and choice outcomes in different contexts and settings; group influences in buyer behaviour; and many more.

In macromarketing the studies that come to mind include the work on food distribution systems carried out in Latin America and elsewhere; trade flows in high level economies; outcome studies focusing on distributive justice and quality of life in differing settings; detailed studies of marketing system structure and function in many different settings in time and space; understanding the ways

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