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Re-placing place in marketing: A resource-exchange place perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study clarifies the marketing discipline's conceptualization of place by presenting a revised perspective and conceptual framework of place, referred to as REPLACE. Drawing from resource exchange theory and attention restoration theory, the framework problematizes the assumption that places are merely physical locales by foregrounding how places can become inseparable aspects of consumers' lives. We present an alternative resource-based perspective of place, namely as a repository of resources that are potentially available to consumers through exchange processes. These exchange processes, and the complexity of the offered resources, influence consumers' relationship with a locale as well as their sense of well-being. With this alternative perspective, we bridge the place concept to public health and extend the understanding of attachment in service settings.

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1. Introduction

The concept of place is sacrosanct in the marketing discipline, codified by the marketing-mix paradigm and its reference as one of the four Ps. Within this paradigm, marketing academics view places as settings that facilitate utilitarian exchanges between buyers and sellers, in which both parties exchange money, goods, or services (Bagozzi, 1975). Other marketers view the place concept as comprised of actions or as "activities that make the product available to target consumers" (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015, p. 53), including channel selection and logistics. Although such conceptualizations of place are valid, some researchers argue that this notion does not capture all meanings of place (Grönroos, 1994; Sherry, 2000).

Heeding MacInnis's (2011) call for original, integrative, and conceptual investigations in the discipline, this research offers a revised resource-based conceptualization of place, which we refer to as the REPLACE framework (see Fig. 1). REPLACE revises the assumption that places are merely physical locales and, instead, identifies how places can become inseparable aspects of consumers' lives. REPLACE is theoretically underpinned by resource exchange theory (Arnould, 2008; Foa & Foa, 2012) and attention restoration theory (ART; Kaplan, 1995; Von Lindern, Hartig, & Lercher, 2016). In addition, REPLACE supports the

core concept of marketing as exchange (Houston & Gassenheimer, 1987) and explicitly recognizes that all service interactions, including place based interactions, are enactments of resource exchange processes (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006).

The framework illustrates the types of resources that consumers exchange with other entities in physical or virtual locales, or resources that are obtained from the stimuli inherent in a locale. The framework also shows how exchanged resources affect the types of attachment that consumers maintain to places, thus heeding the call of Brocato, Baker, and Voorhees (2015) to further develop the place attachment concept. In addition, REPLACE links resources exchanged in consumption settings to consumers' well-being, thus bridging the place concept the transformative service research paradigm (Anderson et al., 2013).

This research asserts that places are locations (online and offline) that become meaningful through intentional interaction (Tuan 1977) and resource exchange (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). Rather than denote a place as a geographic locale that links buyers and sellers (Sherry, 2000), we build on this discussion by offering the discipline a place definition that is rooted in exchange—marketing's foundational core. We argue that a place—commercial or non-profit, physical or virtual, natural or built—represents a repository of resources that are potentially available to consumers and other social units through exchange processes that transpire in consumption settings. These exchange processes, and the complexity of the offered resources, influence consumers' and other social units' relationship with or attachment to a locale as well as their well-being.

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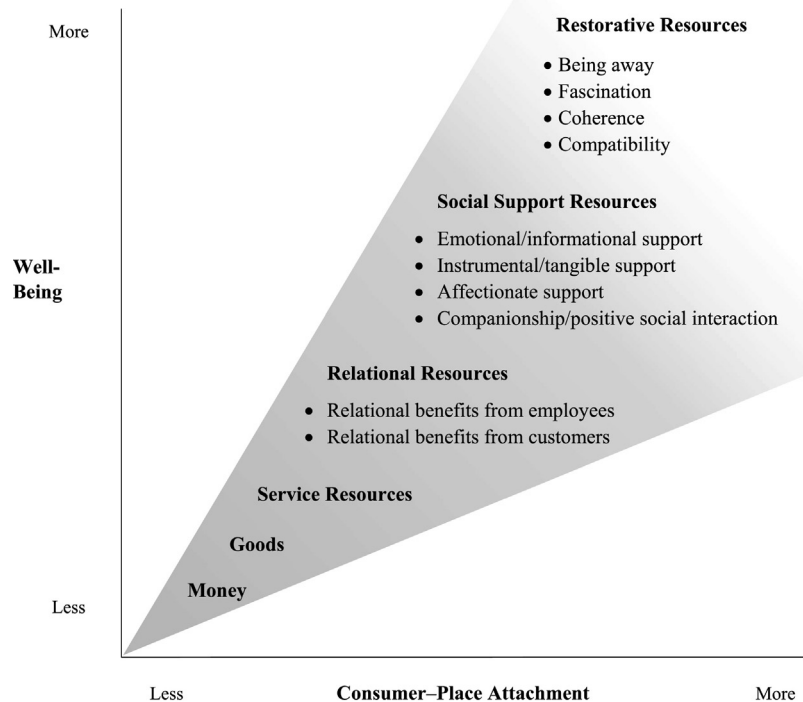


Fig. 1. A conceptual framework of resources exchanged in places.

This proposed place definition addresses Sherry's (2000, p. 277) contention that marketers do not fully grasp the "particularity of place[s] as a lived experience," as the prevailing view of places, as points of distribution, inherently assumes that consumption spaces are inconsequential in consumers' lives and experiences. REPLACE addresses Sherry's concerns by explicating how some resources exchanged in places may transform human well-being. Furthermore, Nilsson and Ballantyne (2014) contend that marketers must understand the meanings that consumers connect with consumption settings, or servicescapes, to fully understand how consumers obtain "value-in-use" from being in places. They suggest that consumers imbue certain locales with evocative and esoteric meanings that are not inherently visible to managers, or even to consumers themselves. REPLACE builds on Nilsson and Ballantyne (2014) by clarifying both the material and incorporeal resources that consumers may simultaneously exchange and receive during their time in servicescapes.

The plan for the paper follows. We begin with a discussion of the role of place in marketing. Next, we identify and delineate each of the conceptual categories that constitute REPLACE. Following this, we develop general propositions for future research and discuss the implications of the framework for marketing academics and managers. Although both consumers and employees interact with and among each other in service settings, REPLACE focuses exclusively on understanding resource exchanges and the consequences, or outcomes, associated with these exchanges on place attachments and well-being from the *consumer perspective*. Although customers and other social entities, such as employees, typically engage in reciprocal resource exchange processes in consumption settings, REPLACE illustrates consumers' outcomes associated with the receipt, rather than the provision, of specific resources during their time in particular consumption settings.

2. The place concept

The roots of the dominant view of place, as an exchange locale, reside in the four schools of thought that represent the marketing discipline's foundation—namely, the commodity, functional, regional, and institutional schools (Powers, 2012). The commodity school views

place as comprising methods of distribution related to goods; the functional school views place as encompassing activities performed in distribution channels; the regional school considers place an empirically formulated break-even point related to a consumer's travel distance; and the institutional school views place as activities that various players perform, including wholesalers, agents, brokers, and retailers, and that result in promoting channel efficiency. Although these schools have merit, the notion that consumers enter settings to fulfill needs other than those associated with consumption is foreign to them.

Although more than half a century has elapsed since the development of the foundational 4 Ps of marketing (McCarthy & Perrault, 1960), academics still tend to conceptualize marketing as a functional "toolkit," in which a "company designs a marketing program, [referring to] the four P's, that delivers the intended value to targeted consumers" (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015, p. 49). Within the four Ps, place is a set of organizational activities that make products available to consumers. This perspective suggests that consumers obtain value primarily through place location, convenience, and product offerings. Places are deemed incapable of affording consumers with high levels of social and psychological benefits beyond that associated with utilitarian or functional exchanges (Debenedetti, Oppewal, & Arsel, 2014).

On the one hand, some commercial and non-profit settings exist to help consumers satisfy their utilitarian needs; on the other hand, some settings exist to help consumers satisfy needs beyond product consumption, such as needs for status, companionship, support, and even mental restoration. Researchers outside marketing, including those in psychology (Cowen, 1982), sociology (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982), cultural geography (Seamon, 2015), and public health (Frumkin, 2003), realize that public places often positively influence human well-being. For example, researchers show that consumers may benefit from patronizing third places, or "public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 16). The reason is that third places often serve as forums for consumers' social relationships; thus, patronage provides consumers with a sense of community. Indeed, consumers' mere sense of being among

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