

## Executive Summaries

*This section provides a concise, nontechnical summary of each article in the current issue of JR focusing on its strategic implications for management.*

### **The Evolution of Marketing Channels: Trends and Research Directions**

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In just the past decade, the number of publications focused on marketing channels has grown by more than 150%, leaving academics and managers to sort through an ever growing, fragmented, and often conflicting body of knowledge to find the latest trends and insights to guide their channel research and practice. This article offers a review and synthesis of the past 30 years of channel literature to parsimoniously explicate the evolution of channel research, identify the underlying drivers of ongoing change, and outline research directions. Following a brief description of the evolution of marketing channel thought from its early inception to the beginning of the modern era (i.e., post-1980), we analyze extant marketing channel literature according to four key perspectives that exemplify the overall body of channel research: (1) theories and constructs, (2) strategies, (3) units of analysis, and (4) substantive domains.

To provide a one-stop reference for channel researchers, we first highlight representative literature, summarized in a series of four tables for each perspective. Then we conduct a content analysis of the relevant topics with the greatest impact on channel research to identify trends within each perspective. To do so, we track the number of citations attributed to each topic within a particular perspective (using the authors' provided keywords, titles, and abstracts), and visually represent the annual frequency and change over time. Finally, we provide research directions based in each perspective, reflecting the context of pertinent trends over the past 30 years of marketing.

Perspective 1 delineates the field's two main theoretical bases, economic and behavioral, and reveals that in general, channel research has shifted over time to the study of more positive relational constructs (e.g., trust, commitment), and away from power and dependence research. Perspective 2 considers the two main strategic

decisions of channel managers, selection and governance, and demonstrates that vertical integration as a selection strategy and relational governance as a governance strategy consistently remain the most studied topics. Perspective 3 evaluates the unit of analysis in channels research, showing that the focus on dyadic relationships has ceded ground to research examining channel networks. Perspective 4 provides insights into the evolution of the field by examining major substantive topics, finding that channel relationships and channel structures have persisted in study, whereas franchising and market entry once enjoyed greater attention but have since waned.

We end by outlining a number of avenues that future research in marketing channels may pursue. Additional research may examine the integration of different theoretical approaches in channel interactions, contingencies of the explanatory power of constructs and theories, and the development and integration of web-based relationship metrics that could be important for managerial practice. Academic inquiry would also be well suited to examine the channel strategy implications of the data-rich environments in which managers increasingly find themselves, which could shed light into the developments of multichannel strategies and two-sided market platforms that are already under way. With its broad scope, this research thus provides a concise reference to the evolution of the most studied marketing channel perspectives, a comprehensive citation-based synthesis of the major components of marketing channels research, and suggestions for the continued development of research on marketing channels.

### **The Evolution of Marketing Channel Research Domains and Methodologies: An Integrative Review and Future Directions**

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Marketing channels are among the most important elements of any value chain. They are so important because the bulk

of a nation's economic output flows through them. Most of these intermediaries perform certain functions, such as transportation, storage, sales, financing, and relationship building, better than most manufacturers. Given their importance in marketing as well as their complexity, it is not surprising that marketing channel management issues have drawn increasing attention in academic research since the early 1950s. As exemplified by the pioneering works of marketing scholars such as Louis Stern and Louis Bucklin, channel research articles to date have tended to employ three broad classes of research methodologies—conceptual, empirical, and microeconomics model-based – to investigate the following six domains of channel intermediaries' inter-organizational relationships: (1) power-dependence relationships, (2) relational outcomes, (3) conflict, (4) control mechanisms, (5) channel structure and selection, and (6) negotiations. While a few review articles have been published to date, so far, however, there has been no review of how the three different methodologies have contributed to advancing knowledge across this set of channels research domains. This paper is the first that aims to (1) chart how channels research employing each of the three classes of methodologies – conceptual, empirical, microeconomics model-based – has evolved over seven decades along with current trends; (2) review the contributions and shortcomings of research to date using these methodologies; and (3) suggest future research opportunities using these methodologies, separately or in an integrated fashion.

More specifically, in this paper, we compile 362 channels research articles published in nine respected marketing and management research journals over the time-span of 1944–2014. With 177 of the 362 papers, empirical studies represent the largest group, while 130 articles are microeconomic model-based contributions, and 55 are primarily conceptual. We further complement this literature review with in-depth discussions with seven leading scholars in the field of marketing channel research. The major conclusions regarding channels research methodologies drawn from the compiled articles and interviews are as follows: Since the early papers of Bucklin and Stern, channels research has undoubtedly broadened (covering additional research domains, more complex issues) and deepened (more rigorous methods, and more focused analytical studies). However, looking ahead, we believe there will be a high payoff from greater emphasis on the following methodologies in future channels research:

- Conceptual development especially of the '*relating*', '*envisioning*' or '*debating*' kind
- Qualitative research of complex channel networks and configurations to support conceptualizations and hypotheses development

- Lab and field experiments
- Proper collection and analyses of dyadic survey data
- Longitudinal and panel data-based studies
- Multichannel and competitive analytical models incorporating individual spatial utility function-based demand models
- Building and estimation of structural models
- Mixed methods

## The Role of Marketing Channels in Supply Chain Management

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Marketing channels serve as a critical link in companies' overall supply chain management (SCM) strategy and practice. In this article, we make a case that SCM is composed of four main functions, including marketing channels, logistics, purchasing, and operations. The notion of "marketing channels" includes the critical "last mile" of the supply chain which serves as the main interface with end-customers for most companies. This is where many companies customize their offerings (products, services) to the customers' needs and wants. As such, a company's marketing channels are oftentimes the most difficult part of the supply chain to strategically manage and tactically implement, but also the part of the chain that has perhaps the greatest effect on the performance of the company.

Importantly, in this article, we discuss compelling thoughts regarding the need to integrate marketing channels thought better with the other three core functions in the supply chain (logistics, purchasing, and operations). In many respects, logistics, purchasing, and operations have been developed separately – as academic and practitioner fields – from marketing channels. Whereas marketing channels issues are typically tackled by marketing professionals, the other core functions of the supply chain are seemingly more integrated in theoretical and practical foundations, with professionals in logistics, purchasing, and operations building more closely on each other's knowledge. Our article generates knowledge, integrates knowledge, and presents a series of takeaways to advance the marketing-channel based supply chain management literature to alleviate this disconnect. Basically, there is a gap in what we know and what we need to know about supply chain management, and that gap rests in marketing channel thoughts and its connection to broader SCM thoughts.

Overall, the storyline in the article captures the interrelatedness of the functions in supply chain management – centered on marketing channels in

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