

Exploring Marketing's Relationship to Society

William L. Wilkie, Special Issue Editor

How Did This Issue Come About?

For much of my career, I have been intrigued with trying to comprehend what the field of marketing is actually about (and what it *might* be about, what it *could* be about, what it *should* be about, and so forth). In recent years, I have joined with my colleague Elizabeth Moore to pursue these questions in a structured manner, and I have come across many interesting findings and ideas. Some are reported in the article, "Marketing's Contributions to Society," which appeared in the special issue of *Journal of Marketing* (Wilkie and Moore 1999). Our plan had been to provide a brief, historical overview of the history of marketing thought as an introduction to that article, but when the section ballooned to 30 pages, we decided to pull it out entirely, revamp and extend its coverage, and develop it as a separate paper. That article, titled "Scholarly Research in Marketing: Exploring the '4 Eras' of Thought Development," appeared in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* about a year ago (Wilkie and Moore 2003). While the paper was going through the review process, Joel Cohen, editor of *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, asked whether I would be interested in pursuing some of the issues that Elizabeth and I were raising in these papers, specifically for me to serve as a special issue editor and encourage the sort of projects we were saying would be useful. I agreed, and this is the result, with which I am very pleased.

What Is the Underlying Question?

Over the past several decades, we have seen a powerful yet subtle shift in the perspectives and priorities of researchers affiliated with academic marketing departments. In terms of "level of analysis," we have now come to stress individual firms and individual managers. Consumer research has likewise come to focus on individual consumers and households. In terms of research goals, we have increasingly focused on assisting managers in making better decisions for their organizations. The mainstream of marketing academia has also increasingly encompassed quantitative and behavioral science research approaches during this period and has developed substantially in its analytical power and rigor. However, these advances have also been accompanied by a *gradual but perceptible erosion in focus on larger questions*: Over the years, we "thinkers" about marketing have been devoting less study, less training, and less attention to marketing's effects on the larger society.

My goal for this special issue was to overtly raise this drift in the field for attention by thoughtful members of the marketing college and to offer a welcoming opportunity for

pursuit of scholarship that would investigate dimensions of marketing's relationship to its larger society. The results appear herein as Section I. In addition, I invited several of the leading thinkers in our field to share their thoughts on the status of the field of marketing. These essays appear in Section II.

Section I Articles

This section begins with a nontraditional (but brief!) op-ed commentary by Paul Farris and I titled "Marketing Scholars' Roles in the Policy Arena: An Opportunity for Discourse on Direct-to-Consumer Advertising." In this article, we point out that (1) marketing academia has engaged in virtually no broad-scale discussions of one of the major marketing and public policy initiatives of the past ten years; (2) direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising is now the third largest spending category, behind only autos and fast food; and (3) this phenomenon is allowed in only the United States and New Zealand. Should DTC advertising be expanded worldwide or, alternatively, curtailed here? What does the marketing college have to say on this topic? To facilitate DTC research in the future, Paul and I provide the results of a recent expert survey that helps reveal the rich dimensions of DTC advertising. Finally, we announce the creation of a Web site that is dedicated to marketing academic discourse on this issue. We invite you to join in the discussion.

The collection of academic articles represents a wide array of issues and approaches, which I have found to be both instructive and enjoyable to read:

- Our lead article expands on a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly important as globalization proceeds: that many citizens of the world do not share positive views of marketing and its impacts on society and thus will fight the spread of our field into their world. Four specific accusations by antiglobalization critics are as follows: (1) marketing in developing countries undermines local cultures, (2) marketing places intellectual property rights ahead of human rights, (3) marketing contributes to unhealthy dietary patterns and unsafe food technologies, and (4) marketing promotes unsustainable consumption. In "Antiglobal Challenges to Marketing in Developing Countries: Exploring the Ideological Divide," Terrence Witkowski describes these four challenges, presents rebuttals by drawing from the philosophy of marketing, and addresses prospects for future conciliation.
- The second article, "When Policies and Marketing Systems Explode: An Assessment of Food Marketing in the War-Ravaged Balkans and Implications for Recovery, Sustainable Peace, and Prosperity," by Clifford J. Shultz II, Timothy J. Burkink, Bruno Grbac, and Nataša Renko, maintains an international focus but attends to the systemic nature of marketing within a society, highlighted here by the catastrophic destruction of a marketing system and by efforts to rebuild it as society attempts to recover on all fronts. Not only is the article

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interesting in its rich description, but it also emphasizes the vital role for marketing systems in the world.

- “What Goes Around Comes Around: A Framework for Understanding Trust–Value Dilemmas of Market Relationships,” by Jagdip Singh, Rama K. Jayanti, Jean E. Kilgore, Kokil Agarwal, and Ramadesikan Gandarvakottai, provides a new framework for linking an individual firm with its larger aggregate marketing system. Roughly, it asserts that (1) a firm is connected to its society through a web of interrelationships, (2) a firm’s marketing performance requires high and balanced levels of trust and value with respect to all these relationships, and (3) these relationships are themselves dynamic and interrelated. All this leads to complex situations, which the authors trace through in the case of 3M’s Scotchguard product when it was feared to be dangerous to health and in the case of Coke’s efforts to market its products inside the Los Angeles public schools.
- Many readers of *JPP&M* are intensely interested in public policy matters, but few may have seriously considered the question, In reality, how well planned and coordinated is the legal and regulatory system for marketing in the United States? Ross D. Petty addresses this provocative issue in “Societal Regulation of the Marketing Function: Does the Patchwork Create a Quilt?” and there is no doubt in my mind that this will give every reader some significant food for thought.
- Another dimension of marketing academics that merits attention is the potential for individual efforts to undertake a “technological transfer” of important marketing theories or methods to help resolve a pressing social problem. Having been most impressed by Thomas Reynolds’s (who readers may recognize as the developer of the widely used “laddering” research methodology) efforts to use theories from decision-making research to improve teacher training and school curricula for underprivileged children, I asked him to describe his ambitious undertaking for publication in this special issue. This appears in his article “Life Goals: The Development of a Decision-Making Curriculum for Education.”
- Our final three articles return to the international setting, which I have come to view as also helping marketers appreciate societal issues through contrasts, much as is done in the study of comparative cultures. In “Developing a Market Orientation in a Transitional Economy: The Role of Government Regulation and Ownership Structure,” Riliang Qu and Christine T. Ennew explore the changes that are occurring in marketing approaches in China as this transitional economy moves from central planning to a market system of some form. Comparison of marketing by state-owned organizations shows contrasts with privately owned ones and helps marketers appreciate the challenges and opportunities in this land of the future.
- A more systemic-level analysis, also set in Asia, is pursued in “Evolution Versus Tradition in Marketing Systems: The Hong

Kong Food Retailing Experience,” by Suk-ching Ho. Readers will find an engaging historical report of Hong Kong’s developing marketplace over time, coupled with an explication of the appropriate roles for public policy in both stimulating and reacting to marketing progress while attempting to safeguard valued elements of the citizenry and its culture.

- The final article, “Customer Orientation in the Context of Development Projects: Insights from the World Bank,” by Debabrata Talukdar, Sumila Gulyani, and Lawrence Salmen, extends the domain of the special issue to efforts to employ marketing knowledge and technology in the interests of economic development, primarily in the poorest sectors of the world. For readers less familiar with this topic, it is an engaging and educational read. In addition, and not to be underestimated, it reflects an advancing appreciation of the marketing field by an area that has traditionally been dominated by other disciplines, such as economics and engineering.

With Thanks ...

In closing, I don’t think I’ll be doing this again, so I would like to forward words of appreciation to Joel Cohen, editor of *JPP&M*, for his initial invitation to me and for his subsequent efforts to smooth the processes and provide constructive advice and moral support while never imposing constraints on what I was trying to do. His able assistant, Brook Hubner, was terrific as well (I think there were times when I worried her, but she never let me know that), and she did a wonderful job of bringing this issue to closure in the most pleasant manner possible. In addition, on the AMA publications side, Francesca Van Gorp Cooley was once again superb: Not only does she make good decisions, but she also handles crises with aplomb, and she is unfailingly gracious to me. Finally, I extend my sincere gratitude to the authors who contributed their work initially and then revised in a positive spirit, and I thank and appreciate the many reviewers who provided incisive and constructive feedback to assist in developing these contributions.

References

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