

The Sages Speak ...

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How Did the “Sages” Section Come About?

As with Section I, the “4 Eras” article (Wilkie and Moore 2003) has also provided an important underpinning for Section II. While doing the research for that article, I was repeatedly impressed by the scholarly and organizational efforts of individual marketing thinkers over the years, and I came to a deeper appreciation of the idea of a “community of scholars” at work in our field. Then, after the “4 Eras” article appeared, Elizabeth Moore and I were contacted by a surprising number of marketing academics who, by letter and e-mail, commented on the article and offered specific insights into, criticisms of, and suggestions about the field of marketing. It was obvious that many of marketing’s leading scholars held both an abiding interest in its undertakings and a serious concern for its directions. One day, while reading a four-page letter from one of the leading figures in the field, I had the idea, “Wouldn’t it be nice for these thoughts to be shared with everyone?”—thus came the idea for these essays.

Because of the historical emphasis of the “4 Eras” article, it seemed that it would be good to invite academic leaders whose careers extended as far back as possible and who spanned a range of research areas. In addition, these should be people for whom the appellation “sage” would be fitting. (I will also point out that in thinking about these invitations, I came to realize how very many people there are in the field who it would have been appropriate to invite, but space limitations were a real concern.) I am very appreciative of the willingness of our essayists to undertake this effort on behalf of the field.

What Were the Sages Asked to Do?

I first asked each essayist to read and review the article “Scholarly Research in Marketing: Exploring the ‘4 Eras’ of Thought Development” from the Fall 2003 issue of *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* (for readers who wish to consult the article before reading the essays, it is available at <http://www.marketingpower.com/content18995C5618.php>). I then encouraged them to address any topic or topics of interest, subject only to space constraints due to limited journal pages. Among the options suggested were (1) additional clarification of *historical developments* in marketing thought, emphasizing useful perspectives that are not generally available; (2) comments on the current *state of the academic field of marketing*, including how well our key institutional entities (e.g., journals, associations, conferences, B-schools, doctoral programs) are performing in terms of thought development; (3) comments on the *role of the societal domain* with respect to marketing thought; and (4) any

further personal observations on *past, present, or future developments*.

The Essays of This Section

All of the sages have labored in this field for portions of at least four decades (i.e., since the 1970s) and for as many as six (extending since the 1950s). Given this set of luminaries and the fact that the essays cover a wide variety of topics and approaches, it was not at all obvious in what order the essays should be presented. My resolution was simple: The essays should appear in the order in which I received them, and so they do.

- It is fitting that the essays begin with the thoughts of a man who has perhaps influenced more students of marketing than anyone in our history and whose work helped bring the managerial perspective to the forefront of marketing academia. In his essay, “The Role Played by the Broadening of Marketing Movement in the History of Marketing Thought,” Philip Kotler provides explanation and detail about the development that he also believes to hold central importance for our field—broadening the concept of marketing.
- When conceiving of this section, I wanted to include the insights of a fine academic who had studied as a doctoral student with the giants of Era II at the Wharton School and who has pursued a long and distinguished career featuring a system-oriented view of marketing in both Canada and the United States. In his essay, “Looking Backward—and Ahead,” Stanley J. Shapiro captures the domains of marketing, explains his enthusiasm for them, and discusses their implications for study in the future.
- Frederick E. Webster has long been an eloquent spokesman for the academic pursuit of the mainstream of marketing management. In recent years, he has expressed concern in other venues about what has been happening to our field in business organizations, as well as how marketing academics have reacted. In his essay, “A Perspective on the Evolution of Marketing Management,” Frederick Webster provides an interesting historical trace of these developments, supplemented by results of a recent major study, and warns of issues calling for more attention from marketing thinkers.
- What is the role of theory in marketing, and what has been happening to it? In addition, with respect to issues such as the fragmentation of our field, what is the structure for scholarship in marketing, especially with respect to publications in our leading journals? Robert A. Peterson, who has served as editor for both *Journal of Marketing Research* and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, discusses these questions and provides an empirical historical comparison in his essay, “Ruminations on Theory and Research Scholarship in Marketing.”
- Leigh M. McAlister is our junior essayist in terms of years of service, but she draws on an especially rich background and set of academic interests that spans the quantitative, behavioral, and strategic sectors of our field. As such, her concerns about certain current issues in the field, discussed in her essay, “Toward Insight and Relevance,” are worthy of serious consideration by all of us.

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- In “Marketing Scholarship, Intellectual Leadership, and the Zeitgeist,” Alan R. Andreasen provides a personalized account of the development of marketing thought as he has experienced it. As a thought leader on topics of the “dark side” of the marketplace, it is interesting to read about his views of opportunities for additional work on the “bright side” of marketing as well. In addition, his proposal for the core nature of our field is interesting and provocative.
- The primary fabric of academic marketing is found in the academic journals of our field, which makes this a key area for analysis and assessment. Donald R. Lehmann undertakes exactly this in his essay, “Journal Evolution and the Development of Marketing,” by first tracing the development of journals over time and then assessing structural issues reflected within the journals of today. This background provides a strong basis for this research leader to express specific concerns and to offer positive directions for our field to pursue.
- Who among us has not enjoyed the style and elegance of Morris B. Holbrook in his many contributions to the literature of our field? In this essay, “Marketing Education as Bad Medicine for Society: The Gorilla Dances,” Morris Holbrook explores an issue raised in the “4 Eras” article: What has happened to the societal domain as a key interest of marketing academics? His pithy response centers on a sea change in business school values in recent years, and it is worthy of serious consideration by those among us who aspire to scholarly contribution.
- In addition to his significant scholarly contributions, Richard Staelin has been a remarkable institutional builder across a range of venues (e.g., business school administration, doctoral program development, executive education, MBA program development, Marketing Science Institute, journal editor). In his essay, “Eras III and IV: My Reflections,” Richard Staelin builds on the “4 Eras” coverage by personifying the development of quantitative science in marketing and the roles for institutional support of the academic enterprise. He then assesses issues involving fragmentation of the field, implications for doctoral training, and possible adaptations across the stages of a professor’s career. This is an insightful tour of issues in our field today.
- A quick look at the numbers provides convincing evidence that the world of business education is undergoing profound and explosive growth on the global stage. What implication does this hold for marketing academia as we know it? David B. Montgomery, one of the builders of the marketing science

field, reflects on his new builder role in his essay, “Asian Management Education: Some Twenty-First-Century Issues.” Here, he discusses the boom in progress, the changing context for it, the impending faculty shortage, and the dangers of dependence on North America as the epicenter of training for marketing scholarship. The essay is an altogether engaging and illuminating exposure for those of us less traveled in this sphere, and it provides much food for thought.

- What about progress and its implications for the future of our field? In his essay, “Customer Advocacy: A New Era in Marketing?” Glen L. Urban, a marketing thinker long at the forefront of technological development, discusses a sea change in customer behavior that he believes has been made possible by the advent of the Internet. Driven by new consumer powers stemming from expanded information, he envisions a new approach dawning for the practice of marketing, shifting from the push/pull model of the past century to a new model based on a “trusted advisor” relationship with consumers. The essay is a well-documented and provocative vision with major implications for the future of the field of marketing.
- In the final essay, “A Dangerous Divergence: Marketing and Society,” Jagdish N. Sheth and Rajendra S. Sisodia present a sweeping assessment of problems that stem from marketing losing sight of its societal imperative and appropriate role within the organization. They discuss evidence that marketing is today suffering from a reeling reputation and standing with its two key constituents: organizations and consumers. These fertile thinkers propose a series of steps that they argue must be taken in three relevant domains—public policy, academia, and organizations—to better align our field with its true missions in the world. This is a broad and powerful analysis that should generate reflection by all of us.

In closing, I want to thank each essayist for the time and effort they volunteered in making these contributions. I believe this represents many of the best characteristics of our field, and I am proud to have had the opportunity to be involved with this effort.

References

- Wilkie, William L. and Elizabeth S. Moore (2003), “Scholarly Research in Marketing: Exploring the ‘4 Eras’ of Thought Development,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 22 (Fall), 116–46.

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