

Marketing research is too narrow: How the field must change to keep producing relevant, timely knowledge

October 25 2023, by Marilyn Stone



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Researchers from TU Dortmund University and RWTH Aachen University published a *Journal of Marketing* article that examines how

specific types of marketing knowledge contributions have developed over the past few decades and suggests ways to move the field toward "big picture" theories that will have greater impact.

The study is titled "[Conceptual Contributions in Marketing Scholarship: Patterns, Mechanisms, and Rebalancing Options](#)" and is authored by Bastian Kindermann, Daniel Wentzel, David Antons, and Torsten-Oliver Salge.

Does research in marketing fail to make meaningful theoretical advancements? Recent analyses have examined the lack of theoretical advancements from various angles, including fragmentation of knowledge, lack of practical impact, tendency for excessive complexity, and the missed opportunity for homegrown theories. These studies shed light on the issue but have limitations that prevent them from fully diagnosing the problem.

The research team provides a differentiated analysis of how specific types of knowledge contributions have developed over the past 32 years. The results both support and question the overall trend of marketing research becoming less disruptive.

Kindermann says, "We conducted computer-aided text analyses of published research articles from the four major marketing journals to trace the development of different types of knowledge contributions. We find that marketing researchers have focused more and more on identifying new phenomena and explaining relatively well-defined problems. At the same time, there has been less focus on building 'big-picture' frameworks and theories and launching critical debates."

As a result, marketing academia may find it challenging to provide answers to complex, practical marketing problems.

"To better understand the reasons underlying such trends, we conducted a large interview study with 48 thought leaders in marketing, including journal editors, department heads, and authors. Based on these interviews, we find that the identified patterns can be traced back to how marketing scholars tend to think about 'ideal' research," adds Wentzel. Anything that cannot be pitched as completely "new," isn't 100% conceptually clear, and defies easy quantification will often be brushed aside.

As Antons explains, "our findings suggest that marketing does not lack novel ideas, but rather limits its focus to exploring specific types of ideas. The field could do more to ascertain how such novel ideas challenge or disrupt previous knowledge."

Next steps for broadening marketing research

What can be done to counter these developments and help scholars provide better answers to the challenges marketing practitioners currently face?

1. Doctoral training programs could be redesigned. For instance, doctoral courses might need to put more emphasis on transmitting the logical, conceptual, and theoretical skills required to engage in critical debate.
2. Changes in editorial policies can also be a lever to support the development of research that focuses more strongly on bigger pictures. Special issues dedicated to the promotion of these types of knowledge contributions can be a valuable step forward. In general, marketing scholars should engage in and use experience from a wider range of academic and nonacademic fields.
3. In view of the multidisciplinary character of marketing problems, scholars could also invest more heavily into building collaborations with researchers from neighboring fields. Such

collaborations might start at the formation stage when doctoral students from marketing are trained with students from other fields. Another option for collaboration resides in jointly conducting and publishing research.

4. Closer interactions between marketing scholars and practitioners, consumer activists, and [policy-makers](#) provide a promising path to reshaping marketing research. Such interactions can help scholars better appreciate the complexity of practical marketing problems and gear their research approaches accordingly. Specifically, scholars and practitioners can work jointly on research projects or start constructive debates at marketing conferences. Also, practitioners might take more active roles as mentors of aspiring marketing researchers.

A need for joint efforts

This research offers important implications for the marketing field:

1. Documentation of the development of marketing scholarship over the past 32 years indicates that the field does not suffer from an overall lack of theorizing efforts. Instead, the analysis suggests that the field has shifted toward certain types of contributions and that this shift has influenced the general development of marketing knowledge.
2. The findings reveal that the tendency to focus on some types of contributions over others affects citation impact. Those articles that typically spark the most citations are the ones that have experienced the steepest decline, suggesting that marketing scholars may be missing an opportunity to achieve higher impact with their work.
3. Marketing research's current challenges can only be solved through a joint effort including marketing scholars, practitioners, consumer activists, and policy makers involved in marketing.

Salge says that "the better we get at rebalancing knowledge creation and emphasizing 'big-picture' frameworks and critical debate, the more valuable will be the results of [marketing research](#)."

4. The authors encourage practitioners, consumer activists, and policy-makers to keep an open mind toward collaborating with universities and other research institutes. Of particular value would be collaborations that span a longer period of time and therefore allow the people involved to engage in an in-depth exchange of ideas. While such collaborations will require investments on both sides, the payoff will be worth it—both in monetary and nonmonetary terms.

More information: Bastian Kindermann et al, EXPRESS: Conceptual Contributions in Marketing Scholarship: Patterns, Mechanisms, and Rebalancing Options, *Journal of Marketing* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/00222429231196122](#)

Provided by American Marketing Association

Citation: Marketing research is too narrow: How the field must change to keep producing relevant, timely knowledge (2023, October 25) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-narrow-field-relevant-knowledge.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.