

A Suggested Taxonomy for Marketing Thought: the Case of Lacking Applied Development and Research in Marketing

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EDITOR'S FOOT-NOTE: Reviewers have agreed that marketing has no Taxonomy and needs one, but that a full study and statement would be a Herculean task. The paper published here is presented as a beginning and, as the author himself states, "in the hope to stir controversy, debate, and effort."

Marketing theory can be segmented according to *intent* (prescriptive or descriptive) and *extent* (general—applicable to firms in general, or specific—applicable to specific firms). Such a dual dichotomy allows the following schemata.

INTENT OF THEORY

		INTENT OF THEORY	
		PRESCRIPTIVE	DESCRIPTIVE
EXTENT OF THEORY	GENERAL		
	SPECIFIC		

While not all of marketing's theoretical efforts and existing paradigms fall exclusively into any one segment, enough do to make this approach valuable for analysis.

When theory is approached in this manner, some surprising inconsistencies are pointed up. For instance some areas are very heavily represented in the literature while one of them is virtually ignored. This short treatment gives a partial listing of marketing theory areas and paradigms applicable to each subset or segment of the above model. The references are not conclusive but do reflect existing work in these areas as well as appropriate topics for study in each segment.

GENERAL PRESCRIPTIVE-MARKETING

A review of the literature and an examination of current marketing trends reveal at least the following general theories and paradigms applicable to prescriptive marketing:

- (1) The Concept of Marketing—conflicting paradigms arise from questions of whether marketing is a profit or service oriented, business or social activity. A familiar example showing this conflict is the Kotler-Luck debate (1969; Luck 1969, Kotler 1972).
- (2) The Production Concept—this paradigm of “produce it, we'll sell it” is out of vogue today but is still very evident (Barksdale and Darden 1971).
- (3) The Marketing Concept—now fashionable, this “satisfy consumer wants” philosophy has attracted much print, but markedly less application (Bell and Emory 1971; McNamara 1972).
- (4) Marketing Theory—increasingly the qualitativist (Aspinwall, Bartels, Kotler, Alderson and Levitt) basis of marketing is being questioned by quantitativists such as Green, Frank, Massy, Bass, and Forrester. The debate involves whether marketing should strive for the rigorousness and replicability of true science or retain a strong qualitative flair.

PRESCRIPTIVE SPECIFIC-MARKETING

Since much consulting effort is concentrated on prescriptive specific-marketing, a large number of such theories could be expected. The results are not disappointing. Some of the more notable theories and paradigms involve:

1. Consumer Pre-Purchase Behavior, Buying Behavior, and Consumption Behavior—there are a number of theories and models here dealing with

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- specific topics but in a prescriptive setting (Bass 1974; Lancaster 1966).
2. Segmentation—one of the key paradigms of marketing is the need to identify markets. Accordingly, much segmentation theorization has been done but again almost all taking of specific techniques in a prescriptive generalized setting (Claycamp and Massy 1968; Weber 1974).
 3. Channels—while a cogent theory of channels is lacking, many segmented theoretical statements exist. The theories, however, are not specifically applicable—nor are they intended to be (Bucklin 1965; Moyer 1975).
 4. Pricing—this area has attracted much attention especially from economists and marketers. Few areas have as many theoretical prescriptive articles dealing with specific variants of this topic (Green 1963; Oxenfeldt 1974).
 5. Advertising—perhaps one of marketings most important areas; little of the work is not prescriptive. Specifically descriptive work is lacking in this area (Ehrenberg 1974; Tosi 1974).
 6. Industrial versus Consumer Goods—current prescriptive theory and marketing paradigms hold that consumer and industrial marketing are different enough to be separate fields. Consequently, a number of dichotomized prescriptive models dealing with these specific topics appear in the literature (Dichter 1973; Industrial 1967).
 7. Market Roles, Expectations, and Interactions—the sociological aspects of general specific-marketing are pronounced, such as the expected behavior of participants in various marketing activities. However, by its very nature sociological aspects deal with general, modal behavior. Thus, describing sociological behavior in any one instance is very difficult (Beik and French 1974; Robin 1974).

DESCRIPTIVE GENERAL-MARKETING

Discriptive general-marketing articles can range from broad national studies to worldwide theoretical applications. Much of the current literature deals with theories of the various parts of marketing (product use, consumer decisions, retail gravitation), psychology (personality, sophistication), and sociology (population interaction, tradition). Little or no emphasis is put on interpretations of collected national data, such as census or United Nations data. Nonetheless, most of these areas are reasonably well covered especially in current events business publications. Some possible and some existing descriptive specific-marketing areas deal with:

1. Anthropological studies—such as those by Belshaw and Drucker (1965; 1958)

2. Psychological and sociological studies—for instance, the preponderance of these in advertising campaigns (Britt 1974; Matlin 1968).
3. Consumerism Studies—this is an increasingly active area in descriptive general-marketing (Day and Aaker 1970; Estes 1971).

DESCRIPTIVE SPECIFIC-MARKETING

The lack of descriptive specific-marketing (applied) articles in the literature is not obvious at first glance, but it is there. It is not just that there is a paucity of good articles in this area, but rather an almost total lack of *any* articles.

Why? There seem to be at least two reasons for the lack of articles in this area of theory. One is that other disciplines, especially psychology and sociology, have numerous descriptive specific-marketing related articles making marketing's replication unnecessary.

Increasingly marketers are turning to the psychological literature for information. This is especially true at the descriptive specific level. Psychology's rich tradition of replication and verification, and its emphasis on human behavior has led to many sound findings of interest to marketers—especially those by consumer behavioralists and marketing researchers. The same holds for the sociological literature. Generally, however, these findings are not directly related to marketing practices. For the most part, the findings have to be adapted to marketing applications. Marketers, then, have a ready supply of research and findings supplied to them negating the need for original research.

While there is some credence to the above argument, a second and more novel argument involves the orientations of practitioners, writers, and the economic orientations of most businesses. In short, there has been simply no incentive or encouragement for such articles. There are many reasons which in fact discourage practitioners from such writing activity:

1. **Lack of Incentive.** Clearly the majority of professional articles in marketing's more respected journals are by academicians. Reasons for such activity range from genuine research interest to escaping the consequences of "publish or perish." The incentive for academicians is clear. But there is no corresponding incentive for practitioners. Publications are not a key promotion or retention item for practitioners. Consequently, potential descriptive specific-marketing contributors are either non-existent or are not encouraged because of their institutional environment.
2. **Working Conditions.** This area is also important. Few practitioners have research-publication oriented jobs. Work, production, and increasing

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company efficiency come first. For many academicians research may precede all of the above mentioned factors. In sum, most companies operate for profit—publications and the time spent on them would probably subtract from the overall goal of profitability.

3. **Competitive Secrecy.** In our predominantly capitalistic society, industrial competition, industrial espionage, and employee raiding for information are very real events. Windfall or increased profits (minimization of losses) oftentimes results from such activity. Consequently, successful and profitable descriptive specific-marketing practices of companies are often well-guarded secrets. Such practices are thus not published purposely, being released—if at all—only when they are unprofitable, outdated, or suitable for descriptive general-marketing publication.

In sum, there is good reason for the lack of specific applied articles: Our sociological and economic systems are incongruous with their publication.

The suggested taxonomy, however, clearly indicates that there are numerous possibilities for descriptive specific marketing related developments. Developments that might be appropriate in the applied section include many of the variables dealt with by businesses on a day to day basis. For instance:

1. Specific consumer behavior studies.
2. Product, price, promotion, and place studies.
3. Profit and loss analysis studies.
4. Government statistics interpretation.
5. Delineation of business practices.
6. Decision analysis, i.e., Bayesian applications.
7. Business applicable sociopsychological variables such as the life cycle approach.

Whether sufficient incentive and encouragement can be generated to elicit such articles, however, remains to be seen. Certainly the need for such developments exists, as this is what marketing is all about in the final analysis.

CONCLUSION

Future improvements on the suggested taxonomy might concentrate first on fulfilling, expanding, or adding applicable theories in each segment. Such a schemata is not static. For instance, it is not totally clear that such dichotomies as listed are altogether appropriate. Multi-national marketing clearly overlaps segments and may call for something more than a simple dichotomy. However, before the identification of another segment or segments other than intent/extent does take place, this simple dichotomy presented in this paper should be

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explored and defined. When adequate evidence exists that this simple dichotomy is inappropriate, which is not the case in the present stage of development in marketing theory, perhaps a new format or model can be suggested. In the meanwhile, it is clear that development in specific applied areas has been deficient. Added attention to this area might well result in unusually productive findings and advances important to all marketers.

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