EXPLORATIONS & INSIGHTS Doctoral seminars in marketing theory

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For incorporating the history of marketing practice and thought

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this paper is to argue for including historical perspectives in doctoral seminars in marketing theory.

Design/methodology/approach - The paper describes how marketing history is currently incorporated into the author's doctoral seminar in marketing theory.

Findings – The author's doctoral seminar in marketing theory incorporates history in three ways: the assignment of specific historical articles, the use of historically oriented, supplementary readings, and the use of history to examine specific controversies.

Originality/value - Rather than marketing history and marketing theory being competitors, they complement each other well in doctoral seminars.

Keywords Marketing, History, Marketing theory, Seminars

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

Doctoral students in marketing should be historically informed. They should know about historical research method, the history of marketing education, the history of marketing practice, and the history of marketing thought. Indeed, "One is [...] hard pressed to overestimate the importance of history in preparing the next generation of scholars" (Jones and Keep, 2009, p. 151). Teaching history in doctoral programs enables us "to transmit the intellectual heritage of the discipline from one generation of scholars to the next" and provide students with "the raw materials and component parts, i.e. the concepts and theories, required to produce new knowledge" (Shaw, 2009, p. 330-1). It "broadens and deepens our understanding of marketing" and "provides a context and perspective for contemporary marketing practices and ideas" (Jones, 2009, p. 5). Furthermore, consistent with the "responsibilities framework" approach to marketing (Hunt, 2010), academics who maintain that marketing is (or ought to be) a profession and who favor advancing the marketing discipline toward being a professional discipline incur an obligation to know marketing's intellectual history and to transmit that knowledge to their students.

Marketing doctoral seminars on consumer behavior, models, strategy, marketing theory, and research methods are common. However, only a few – probably less than six - doctoral programs include seminars on marketing history. Hopefully, given © Emerald Group Publishing Limited the increasing quantity of historical research being published and the advent



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of the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, more doctoral seminars on marketing history will be forthcoming. Until that hope materializes, either doctoral students will be uninformed about our discipline's intellectual history or historical material must be included in existing doctoral seminars. Starting with the very first time I taught marketing theory at the University of Wisconsin in the spring semester of 1969, the seminar has included readings and discussions concerning marketing history. My experience has been that providing historical materials in the doctoral seminar on marketing theory works well.

This essay argues for including historical perspectives in marketing theory seminars. Before discussing how to incorporate marketing history into a marketing theory seminar, I first provide some background on Michigan State University's (MSU) doctoral program in the 1960s and the role of marketing history in that program. That is, I first provide an historical perspective on my use of historical perspectives in the marketing theory seminar.

Background

After an undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering from Ohio University and several years in sales at Hercules Powder Company, I entered Michigan State's doctoral program in the spring quarter of 1966. While in the program, I had courses from and/or interacted significantly with several faculty, including George Downing, Stan Hollander, B.J. "Bud" LaLonde, Bill Lazer, Jerry McCarthy, Tom Staudt, and Don Taylor[1]. In the fall quarter of 1966, I took the marketing history seminar from Bud LaLonde. (At that time, Stan Hollander taught the retailing doctoral seminar but not the history seminar.) Without question, I learned more about marketing in LaLonde's history seminar than in any other course I took in the doctoral program. LaLonde's history seminar provided a context for understanding current (1960s) marketing concepts, theories, and practice.

The reading assignments in LaLonde's history seminar were voluminous. They focused equally on the history of marketing practice and the history of marketing thought. Although we read and discussed Bartels' (1962) *Development of Marketing Thought*, LaLonde was highly critical of development on the grounds that it:

- · too neatly categorized historical periods by decades;
- ignored the history of marketing practice; and
- gave insufficient attention to how marketing practitioners influenced what was taught in marketing academe.

As LaLonde pointed out, marketing practice in each time period not only strongly informed the specific concepts and theories taught in marketing academe, but it also influenced the particular approaches that academics adopted in the teaching of marketing. For example, students learned that the controversies in the early part of the twentieth century over the role of middlemen in channels of distribution prompted the development of the commodity, institutional, and functional approaches to the study of marketing[2].

In addition to the reading assignments, LaLonde distributed each week a series of five to ten seminar questions. Class discussion focused on both the readings in general and the questions in particular. The following are representative of the kinds of questions that students were required to ponder:



(1) Evaluate the role of the following factors in developing a mass market in the USA:

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- · immigration;
- · urbanization; and
- · factor endowment.
- (2) What impact did the following events have on the structure of distribution in the USA?:

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- · completion of transcontinental railroad;
- · Civil War;
- · First World War;
- · introduction of motor truck; and
- introduction of automobile.
- (3) Between 1915 and 1930 the literature seems to reflect the following trends:
 - a shift in perspective from the position of generalized "distribution" to a
 perspective of the firm;
 - an increasing awareness of the role of the consumer in a mass distribution system; and
 - a shift from a descriptive orientation to a strategic orientation. Comment on the reasons for these shifts and their relationship to each other.
- (4) The thesis that the evolution of a marketing system is a logical response to a business environment has been presented earlier in the seminar. Proceeding from this thesis, is it possible to identify and analyse the marketing factors which contribute to and accelerate economic development? If it is possible to identify these elements, can marketing technology and/or marketing institutions be transferred to developing countries to accelerate economic development?

In addition to serving as a basis for class discussion, the final examination was drawn from the questions distributed[3]. Therefore, students studied together in order to develop (hopefully thoughtful) answers to LaLonde's – what we considered to be at the time, mind-bending – questions. LaLonde's procedure of distributing challenging questions in advance of the final examination is a pedagogical practice that I borrowed and continue to use in my doctoral seminars. Thank you, Bud.

The MSU marketing theory doctoral seminar

The marketing history seminar nicely complemented the theory seminar, which I took twice, first from George Downing and the second time from Bud LaLonde. Both times the seminar focused on theory development and critical evaluation, with a special emphasis on Alderson's *Marketing Behavior and Executive Action* (1957) and *Dynamic Marketing Behavior* (1965). As I recount in Hunt (2001), though class discussions were always vigorous, I noticed that students often seemed to be "talking past" each other, rather than engaging in truly productive interaction. A neighbor, a doctoral student in philosophy, showed me that a major reason our class discussion was often unproductive was that we were failing to separate our substantive disagreements from those of a purely semantic nature. That is, as long as participants were using such terms as "science," "theory,"



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"explanation," "hypotheses," "axioms," and "laws" in radically different ways, our semantical differences would impede us from resolving substantive disagreements.

My philosophy neighbor introduced me to analytical philosophy, as exemplified by the works of Carl Hempel, Richard Rudner, and Ernest Nagel. The critical discussions that I found in the works of these philosophers of science impressed me with their clarity of exposition and logical structure. As a consequence, it seemed to me that students taking marketing theory courses could benefit greatly from being exposed to the "tool kit" of the philosophy of science.

After graduating from MSU in December 1968, I joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. By that time, I was firmly convinced that:

- both marketing history and marketing theory should be key parts of doctoral education in marketing;
- marketing theory seminars should have a strong philosophy of science orientation;
- I was not competent, nor likely to become competent enough, to teach a complete seminar on marketing history; and
- if I read extensively in the philosophy of science, I could develop a thoughtful, useful, philosophically informed, marketing theory seminar.

Thus, when Wisconsin asked me to teach the marketing theory seminar my very first semester, I taught it with a strong philosophy of science orientation. Furthermore, since Wisconsin did not offer a doctoral seminar on marketing history, I decided to incorporate significant materials on marketing history into the theory seminar. I have done so ever since, both at Wisconsin and now at Texas Tech University.

The marketing theory seminar

From the early days at the University of Wisconsin, through the little green book (Hunt, 1976) years, to the red book (Hunt, 1983) period, to the blue book (Hunt, 1991) years, to the time of the turquoise and purple books (Hunt, 2002, 2003), and up to the present day (Hunt, 2010), my doctoral seminar in marketing theory has evolved in many ways. What has stayed constant, however, is that the course has always adopted a philosophy of science approach to understanding marketing science and analysing marketing theories. The philosophical orientation of my approach is best described as a combination of critical pluralism and scientific realism.

The structure of the current marketing theory course follows the organization of *Marketing Theory: Foundations, Controversy, Strategy, Resource-advantage Theory* (Hunt, 2010)[4]. The text is supplemented with a host of articles and other books. Specifically, the course is organized around the text's four major sections. The first section of the course is "The nature of marketing and science." After two to three weeks on this topic, the course moves to Section 2, "The foundations of marketing theory," which takes four to five weeks to explore the nature of explanations, laws, and theories in science. Section 2 also uses examples from exchange theory, relationship marketing, and the service-dominant logic to explore how theories are developed.

Section 3 examines arguments that resource-advantage (R-A) theory is "Toward a general theory of marketing." The course focuses on three different arguments. First, because marketing takes place within the context of competition, a general theory

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of marketing should be consistent with the most general theory of competition. Accordingly, because R-A theory is a general theory of competition, it is an appropriate foundation for working toward a general theory of marketing. Second, the closest thing to a general theory of marketing today is Alderson's (1957, 1965) functionalist theory of market behavior. Therefore, R-A theory is toward a general theory of marketing because it accommodates and extends key concepts and generalizations from Alderson's theory and integrates them into a broader theoretical framework. The third argument is that R-A is toward a general theory of marketing because it provides a foundation for the normative area of marketing strategy.

The fourth section of the course, "Controversy in marketing theory," reviews and analyses several controversies that have developed in the "philosophy debates" in marketing. Examples of specific controversies addressed include:

- (1) Does science (and, therefore, marketing science) differ from nonscience in any fundamental way (or ways)?
- (2) Does "positivism" (i.e. logical positivism and logical empiricism) dominate marketing research?
- (3) Does positivism imply quantitative methods?
- (4) Would positivist research be causality-seeking, adopt the machine metaphor, adopt realism, be deterministic, reify unobservables, and adopt functionalism?
- (5) What is philosophical relativism?
- (6) Is relativism an appropriate foundation for marketing research?
- (7) Does relativism imply pluralism, tolerance, and openness?
- (8) Should qualitative methods (e.g. naturalistic inquiry, humanistic inquiry, ethnographic methods, historical method, critical theory, literary explication, interpretivism, feminism, and postmodernism) be more prominent in marketing research?
- (9) Do qualitative methods imply relativism?
- (10) What is the philosophy known as "scientific realism?"
- (11) Is scientific realism an appropriate foundation for marketing research?
- (12) Are true theories, as emphasized by realism, an appropriate goal for marketing research?
- (13) Is objective research in marketing possible?
- (14) Should marketing pursue the goal of objective research?

Incorporating marketing history

Currently, I incorporate history into the seminar in three ways. These include:

- (1) the assignment of specific historical articles;
- (2) the use of historically-oriented, supplementary readings; and
- (3) the use of history to examine specific controversies.

The first way

The seminar begins with 17 readings spread over the first two weeks. Appendix 1 lists the readings, with readings one through eight assigned the first week. The very first reading is



historical, that is, Chapter 10, "General marketing," from Bartels' (1988) third edition (his final). This is followed by "A history of schools of marketing thought" (Shaw and Jones, 2005). Students then read the first chapter of Hunt (2010), which has significant historical material in it, including discussions of the "is marketing a science?" and "broadening the concept of marketing" controversies. Chapter 1 also uses the three dichotomies model to trace the historical development of the approaches to the study of marketing from the (profit sector/macro/positive) commodity, institutional, and functional approaches to the development of the (profit sector/micro/normative) managerial approach so common today.

Students are then required to read and evaluate the results of two, major, historically oriented evaluations of marketing, conducted a decade apart (Monroe, 1988; Myers *et al.*, 1979). Next, two readings on the history of the American Marketing Association's (AMA) attempts to define marketing (Gundlach, 2007; Ringold and Weitz, 2007) highlight the extreme diversity in thought concerning the fundamental nature of marketing as a practice and an area of inquiry. Students come to realize that the history of marketing thought sheds light on why the controversy over defining marketing is so heated. They also come to realize that it has been historically commonplace for evaluators of marketing to find it in "crisis," or at a "crossroads," or needing a "renewal," a "revolution," a "paradigm shift," or a "reform." Indeed, it is difficult to find a period in marketing's history when commentators find it not in need of major change. So it has been; so it is; and so it probably will be.

In the second week, students read, discuss, and evaluate readings nine through 17 in Appendix 1. Seven of the nine have significant historical context. Students find that Kerin's (1996) history of the *Journal of Marketing* is as much of a history of marketing thought as it is a history of the journal. Also, Wilkie and Moore's (2003) rightly celebrated "4 Eras" of marketing thought work is extensively discussed and contrasted with the approaches explored in week one.

The final reading in week two is Chapter 2 of Hunt (2010) on the nature of the market discipline. The chapter reviews some of the historical debates concerning marketing and situates them within the perspective of the "responsibilities framework." In this perspective, marketing is a university discipline that aspires to be a professional discipline. Accordingly, it is argued that marketing has responsibilities:

- to society, for providing objective knowledge and technically competent, socially responsible, liberally educated graduates;
- to students, for providing an education that will enable them to get on and move up the socioeconomic ladder and prepare them for their roles as competent, responsible marketers and citizens;
- to marketing practice, for providing a continuing supply of competent, responsible entrants to the marketing profession and for providing new knowledge about both the micro and macro dimensions of marketing; and
- to the academy, for upholding its mission of retailing, warehousing, and producing knowledge, its contract with society of objective knowledge for academic freedom, and its core values of reason, evidence, openness, and civility[5].

The second way

The second way that history is incorporated into the seminar is with the supplemental readings, as listed in Appendix 2. Each week students read one to two books from the



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supplemental list. Students do not read the supplementary books in depth. Rather, they are required to skim them, grasp the essential structure and ideas in each, be prepared to discuss them in class, and relate them to the required readings. The specific books from Appendix 2 assigned each week vary somewhat each time I teach the theory seminar. Always, however, students are assigned Bartels' (1988) *History of Marketing Thought* in the first week and Sheth *et al.*'s (1988) *Marketing Theory: Evolution and Evaluation* in the second week. The preceding two books complement well the historically-oriented articles students read in the first two weeks.

Many of the books in the supplementary readings list are designed to provide an historical perspective on current controversies in marketing theory and the philosophy of science. That is, though students may be assigned Halbert's (1965) *Meaning and Sources of Marketing Theory*, Schwartz's (1963) *Development of Marketing Theory*, Kuhn's (1962) *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Hempel's (1965) *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*, Feyerabend's (1975) *Against Method*, or Nagel's (1961) *The Structure of Science*, none of the books is discussed as representing current thinking in marketing or the philosophy of science. Rather, each shows how marketing theory and the philosophy of science have developed and how history has influenced current thought.

The third way

The third way that history is incorporated into the seminar is in the fourth section of the course. Specifically, I use historical materials to address the (previously stated) 14 questions that have been prominent in the "philosophy debates" in marketing[6].

Many marketers trace the philosophy debates to a panel discussion on philosophy of science at the 1982 AMA Winter Educators Conference[7]. Although the original debate was "spirited, but always civil" (Hunt, 2001, p. 118), by the mid-1980s it was clear that marketing's philosophy debates were becoming increasingly unproductive: Discussions of ideas degenerated into *ad hominem* debates, epistemology morphed into "epistobabble" (Coyne, 1982), honest mischaracterizations became "nastiness and purposeful distortions" (Hirschman, 1989, p. 209), and a concern for civility reverted to "ridicule" (Pechmann, 1990, p. 7).

Furthermore, by the mid-1980s the nihilistic implications of relativism were becoming clear. For example, advocates of reality relativism were arguing that the Holocaust was a socially constructed reality, only one of many multiple realities (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 84). Because such a view would imply the nihilistic conclusion that the Holocaust's occurrence or nonoccurrence could not be objectively appraised independently of the worldview of a person's social grouping – that is, there is no truth to the matter – I found this view disturbing. I believed that a major factor contributing to the muddled status of the philosophy debates was a lack of understanding – on both sides – of logical positivism and logical empiricism. If participants had an accurate understanding of:

- What positions the logical positivists and empiricists actually espoused and rejected?
- How positivism differs from other philosophical "isms," marketing's debates could be raised to a more informed level?.

Therefore, I decided to conduct historical research on philosophy of science in an effort to raise the quality of marketing's philosophy debates. That research led to four new



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chapters in Hunt (1991) entitled "Philosophy of science: historical perspectives and current status." Subsequently, revised versions of the historical materials became Chapters 1-5 of Hunt (2003). My experience has been that when students have been exposed to the historical material in these chapters, it results in them being able to develop more-informed, logical, well-reasoned analyses of the controversies in the philosophy debates.

Therefore, the third way that history is incorporated into my current marketing theory seminar is to use historical materials in the analyses of many of the controversies in the philosophy debates. I do this by assigning Chapters 1-5 of Hunt (2003) as supplementary readings in the fourth section of the course. This historical material complements well, and provides a foundation for, the analyses in four chapters in Hunt (2010): Chapter 9 (On scientific realism and marketing research), Chapter 10 (On science/nonscience, qualitative methods, and marketing research), Chapter 11 (On truth and marketing research), and 12 (On objectivity and marketing research).

An example of the third way

A major controversy in marketing's philosophy debates provides an example of the third way that history is incorporated into the theory seminar. The issue addressed is whether marketing should adopt some form of qualitative methodology. A common argument for qualitative methods has been what is labeled "the positivism is dead" argument. Stated succinctly, this argument is:

- Positivist research (i.e. research guided by the tenets of logical positivism) dominates marketing, management, and consumer research.
- Positivist research is the same thing as quantitative research, and is causality seeking, adopts determinism and the machine metaphor, is realist, reifies unobservables, and is functionalist.
- Positivism has been shown to be dead (or thoroughly discredited) in the philosophy of science.
- Therefore, all research that is quantitative, causality seeking, and so forth, is also discredited.
- Therefore, researchers should adopt some form of qualitative or "interpretivist" method.

Chapter 10 of Hunt (2010) uses the historical materials assigned to students as supplementary readings to show that premise 1 of the "positivism is dead" argument is false. Furthermore, focusing on premise 2, the historical analyses show that positivist research:

- is not the same thing as quantitative research:
- does not imply the search of causation;
- · does not imply determinism and the machine metaphor;
- is not realist;
- · cannot reify unobservables; and
- · does not imply functionalism.



Therefore, because premises 1 and 2 in the "positivism is dead" argument are historically false, the argument fails. It is no wonder, then, that participants in the philosophy debates have complained of "misses" (i.e. misconceptions, misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and mischaracterizations). The rhetoric of positivism bashing, so common in discussions justifying qualitative studies, actually degenerates into nothing more than simply the bashing of contemporary marketing and consumer research. Indeed, the term "positivism" in the social science literature has become just a convenient term of abuse. As philosophers of science have noted, this way of using "positivism":

[...] is not a mere terminological confusion. It is so tendentiously inaccurate that *positivist* [...] becomes a term of abuse [...]. In reality, logical positivism was the most self-critical movement in the history of philosophy. Every major objection to positivism was proposed by positivists themselves or associates at work on problems set by positivism, all in the scientific spirit of seeking truth. It is particularly unfortunate that the technical failure of particular positivist doctrines is so often used [...] to cover an attack on clarity and science itself (Levin, 1991, p. 63-4).

Because it is so well known that positivism's technical failures have resulted in its being discredited or even "dead" in the philosophy of science, attacking contemporary marketing, management, and consumer research by labeling it "positivist" has, no doubt, been rhetorically successful in gaining converts to qualitative research. But there is a price to pay when academic communities justify historically false argumentation on the grounds of rhetorical success.

If qualitative researchers knowingly (and knowingly is key here) justify their methods by using rhetoric that violates the integrity of the past and constitutes sophistry or prevarication, this prompts users of qualitative research to wonder: Are the results reported in qualitative studies also untrustworthy? Academic integrity is worth safeguarding. Communities of academic researchers have fiduciary responsibilities to their colleagues, to other academics, to students, and to society at large. The price paid for false rhetoric is the potential destruction of trust, both:

- · among academics; and
- · between academics and each of their client publics.

This price, I suggest, is too high – it is also a price that it is unnecessary to pay.

The rhetoric of positivism bashing is, I argue, unnecessary for justifying qualitative methods. That is, it is unnecessary for qualitative researchers to discredit quantitative research in order to justify their own studies. Qualitative and quantitative researchers are not, or at least should not be, adversaries. Rather, sometimes qualitative studies add to what we know from quantitative research and sometimes it is just the reverse. Therefore, qualitative studies complement quantitative research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, doctoral students in marketing should be historically informed. However, few doctoral seminars on marketing history exist. Hopefully, this situation will change. Until then, marketing should incorporate historical materials into existing doctoral seminars. My experience has been that incorporating history into the marketing theory doctoral seminar works well. I encourage others to, likewise, fuse history into theory.



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Notes

- MSU's Department of Marketing and Transportation Administration in the 1960s had over two dozen faculty. The ones mentioned here are the faculty that I recall having the most interaction with.
- My paper for the history seminar was on the functions of marketing. The paper served as the starting point for an article in honor of Stan Hollander that I co-authored with Jerry Goolsby some two decades later (Hunt and Goolsby, 1988).
- 3. I doubt that I could today develop satisfactory answers to these questions. Could you? Could your doctoral students? Should your students be able to answer such questions?
- 4. Electronic copies of my current syllabus are available (e-mail: shelby.hunt@ttu.edu).
- 5. As previously mentioned, my theory seminar continues to evolve. After developing a draft of this paper, it became evident that the reading assignments in the first two weeks (Appendix 1) and the supplementary readings (Appendix 2) contain little on the history of marketing practice. I hope to address this deficiency in the near future. Readers' suggestions on specific articles and books that might be included are welcomed.
- 6. See Easton (2002) for a review of the debates.
- See Hunt (2001) for more on how the panel was formed and the positions of the participants.
 See Hunt (1983, pp. 424-48) for a transcript of the debate.

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Appendix 1. Marketing theory doctoral seminar, readings for weeks one and two *Week one:*

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About the author

Shelby D. Hunt is the Jerry S. Rawls and P.W. Horn Professor of Marketing at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. A past Editor of the Journal of Marketing (1985-1987), he is the Author of numerous books, including Foundations of Marketing Theory: Toward a General Theory of Marketing (Hunt, 2002), Controversy in Marketing Theory: For Reason, Realism, Truth, and Objectivity (Hunt, 2003), and A General Theory of Competition: Resources, Competences, Productivity, Economic Growth (Hunt, 2000). One of the 250 most frequently cited researchers in economics and business (Thompson-ISI), he has written numerous articles on



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competitive theory, strategy, macromarketing, ethics, relationship marketing, channels of distribution, philosophy of science, and marketing theory. Three of his Journal of Marketing articles, "The nature and scope of marketing" (1976), "General theories and fundamental explananda of marketing" (1983), and, with Robert M. Morgan, "The comparative advantage theory of competition" (1995), won the Harold H. Maynard Award for the "best article on marketing theory." The "Comparative advantage theory" article also won the 2004 Sheth Foundation/Journal of Marketing award for its "long term contributions to the field of marketing." His 1985 Journal of Business Research article with Lawrence B. Chonko, "Ethics and marketing management," received the 2000 Elsevier Science Exceptional Quality and High Scholarly Impact Award. His 1989 article, "Reification and realism in marketing: in defense of reason," won the Journal of Macromarketing Charles C. Slater Award. His 1994, "Commitment and trust," Journal of Marketing article, with Robert M. Morgan, was the most highly cited article in economics and business in the 1993-2003 decade (Thomson-ISI). For his contributions to theory and science in marketing, he received the 1986 Paul D. Converse Award from the American Marketing Association, the 1987 Outstanding Marketing Educator Award from the Academy of Marketing Science, the 1992 American Marketing Association/Richard D. Irwin Distinguished Marketing Educator Award, and the 2002 Society for Marketing Advances/Elsevier Science Distinguished Scholar Award. Shelby D. Hunt can be contacted at: shelby.hunt@ttu.edu

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