Commentary on “developing successful theories in marketing: insights from resource-advantage theory”

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Theory development, as Professor Hunt details, is incredibly important to academic inquiry. Empirical investigations rely on theory to frame and guide not only the questions that are asked, but also the interpretations given to results. Well-crafted academic theory can have a tremendous impact in furthering academic understanding and real world practice. But, as with most outputs of high-value, successful theory building is difficult to do well.

That theory development is - to put it euphemistically - “challenging” is not news to any doctoral student. Memories of my own philosophy of science course still haunt me to this day. Nightmares of third libraries in the sky, mediators, moderators, levels, process models... the list of aggressors seems endless. What came out of the course, though, was an ability to think more logically, more critically, and - most importantly - more academically. But, just as knowing how to paint doesn't make a person on par with Monet, knowing the mechanics of theory development doesn't mean a person's theory is of any value or use.

Professor Hunt's article fills an aching void for increased knowledge of what makes a theory not just another theory, but a *successful* theory. Going beyond the mechanics of the components of sound theory, Professor Hunt's article provides insight into the factors that propel a theory to notoriety and, most importantly, adoption and use. His paper offers needed advice during a time of relatively less theory development among marketing academics. I commend him for the effort he has devoted to sharing his

wisdom through this article. What I offer next is a humble discussion of the five factors Professor Hunt presents. I hope to offer a sense of the lens that a recent PhD graduate might use in reading his article. My comments are intended not as a critique of his article, but as a friendly continuation of the important discussion he has kindly opened.

Professor Hunt's first suggestion is to address an important issue in marketing. This is undoubtedly key in crafting theory that gains traction within the academic community, yet knowing which issues to devote effort to is incredibly difficult. Prevalence of empirical articles in an area serve only as a rough guide since such articles (hopefully) build on existing theory. Previous theoretical work is an excellent basis for building theory, yet foundation in existing theory does not itself make a theory novel. What instead seems crucial for developing *successful* theory is a keen eye for recognizing not only gaps in the literature, but issues of real relevance to marketing. I offer that enacting Professor Hunt's advice demands marketing academics not only be well read within the academic sphere, but also keenly aware of current issues facing marketing practitioners.

The second factor offered is the need for a successful theory to offer strong explanatory and predictive power. I most certainly agree with Professor Hunt that good theory must demonstrate both features, but ask how a researcher can know *a priori* that his or her theory is likely to provide explanatory and predictive power. Looking back, the value of Resource-Advantage Theory is well documented and clear. I ask what diagnostics were available looking forwards. Were there deliberate features of theory that were incorporated during its formation to increase its use? What litmus test(s) was used to know the theory was a “winner” before the numerous empirical tests were conducted? Insight into the development process Professor Hunt -

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and other successful theory builders – went through while building their theories would be tremendously insightful for those attempting to craft their own theories.

Professor Hunt next encourages those building theory to draw on – and also contribute back to – the extant theory in related domains. He uses one of his own papers as an example of the sheer degree of non-marketing attention a good theory can receive. While the potential for impact in a wider arena is inspiring, the aspect of Professor Hunt's experience that I found most intriguing is the effort devoted to situating an article in a domain. He writes of reading through ten years of *Journal of Economic Issues* so as to properly position an article for that journal. This anecdote is a potent reminder of the sheer hard work entailed in writing

a successful theory paper. Today, with online searching, the challenge is not only in locating potentially relevant articles, but also in deciding which merit further scrutiny and incorporation. Again the thoughts and tips of those who have confronted this challenge would be of value.

Finally, Professor Hunt reminds us of the importance of offering normative implications as a means of bolstering a theory's adoption. This ties into his first factor – addressing an important issue – and acts as a final reminder that marketing does not exist in a void.

In closing I thank Professor Hunt for sharing his insights on what makes a theory successful. As an early career researcher, I find articles such as his incredibly beneficial and hope it is the first of many in *AMS Review* to tackle issues with theory development.