

Marketing and organization theory: opportunities for synergy

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The marketing and management disciplines have a history of exchange and mutual benefit that dates back several decades (cf. Biggadike 1981). The contributions of each discipline to concepts such as market orientation, innovation, strategic types, and the product life cycle have enhanced the other discipline. In addition, many other topics have also received similar coverage across the scholarly marketing and management disciplines. This special issue of *JAMS* represents a collective effort of editors, authors, and reviewers to build additional important synergies between marketing and management within the context of organization theory.

A solid theoretical foundation is typically a necessity to construct an appropriate and robust underpinning for marketing research and, by extension, to achieve impact in the field. In that context, organization theory is particularly useful in the context of contributing to strategic marketing thought. Specifically, organization theory can accomplish at least three critical goals in helping marketing and management researchers to better understand organizations (Dubin 1978; Kerlinger 1986). First, theory can provide *description* of relationships between variables. In other words, theorizing can help researchers identify what variables are important to consider and what kinds of relationships exist among these variables. Second, theory can enable *prediction* of important outcomes such that, if

certain antecedent conditions are identified, expectations can be offered about what subsequent events will be observed. Third, theory can allow *explanation* of why variables are related in certain ways.

This special issue of *JAMS* was inspired in part by a sense that marketing research emphasizes two of these goals more than the other. As an applied field, marketing does well at describing relationships among variables and predicting outcomes such as business unit performance. Less attention is often paid to explanation. Ideally, the foundations of theoretical explanations are carefully developed assumptions, tenets, and logic (Dubin 1978). In seeking to address why important variables are related to each other, some marketing articles rely more heavily on citations of and quotations from previous work than on theoretical explanation. In contrast, management research strongly emphasizes theoretical explanations—perhaps because it has roots in sociology. This emphasis may evolve into obsession at times. Indeed, one of management's leading scholars recently wondered aloud if management research is *too* devoted to theorizing (Hambrick 2007).

Viewed broadly then, marketing and management are two allied fields with a long history of productive exchange. The former often seems to downplay explanation within its theorizing while the latter often fixates on it. From our perspective as editors, this juxtaposition presented an interesting opportunity for knowledge development.

As noted in the special issue call for papers, we aspired to attract papers that would “shed greater insights into how organization theories can help describe, explain, and predict marketing phenomena. Theories and questions that can be addressed include but are *not* limited to: Do certain marketing practices meet the criteria for serving as strategic resources (resource-based view)? To what extent does knowledge exchange facilitate marketing action

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(knowledge-based view)? To what extent do strategic decisions about marketing activities shape performance (strategic choice theory)? Under what conditions is a marketing channel member likely to exploit other members (agency theory)? To what extent should marketing practices mimic industry best practices (institutional theory)? To what extent does the marketing level of analysis help explain behaviors beyond other levels of analysis, e.g., firm, industry, country (systems theory)?”

As described briefly next, many of these important questions are addressed in the articles that appear in this special issue. More importantly, the authors of these papers have provided creative theoretical insights beyond those that we anticipated being offered. The result is a set of articles that individually identify important synergies between marketing and organization theory while collectively advancing knowledge about marketing.

Building synergies between marketing and organization theory

The first two articles in the issue are composed by two of the most prominent teams of international business scholars in the last several decades. First, Johanson and Vahlne (2011) extend their long-standing research stream, the internationalization process of firms (Johanson and Vahlne 1977), and center attention on markets as networks and the resulting implications for marketing strategy. Next, Buckley and Casson (2011) similarly extend their research on the multinational enterprise (Buckley and Casson 1976) to the field of marketing. These articles represent the integration of organization theory, international business, and marketing thought and are unique contributions to marketing in general and international marketing in particular.

The third article is written by the *JAMS* editor, Tomas Hult (2011); it integrates 31 different organization theories and places them in the context of key marketing implications for the boundary-spanning marketing organization—a contemporary organizational form that has promise for the study of organizations in general and market-oriented organizations in particular. The paper has the two-fold purpose of delineating the components of the boundary-spanning marketing organization, in essence developing a theory of the boundary-spanning marketing organization, and then using the collection of 31 different organization theories to derive marketing implications from the theoretical structure offered by this form of marketing organization.

The fourth article is composed by two former editors of the *Academy of Management Journal* (Ireland and Hitt)

together with a team of three co-authors. Driven mainly by institutional theory, Webb et al. (2011) look at the customer as being a central aspect of the market opportunity that is often presented in the entrepreneurial process. Marketing activities are a key component of their thinking, much like in Hult’s integration of 31 organization theories. The seventh article in the issue, by Hillebrand et al. (2011), also uses institutional theory, in this case to study customer relationship management (CRM) effectiveness.

The Yarbrough et al. (2011) piece, the fifth article in the issue, drills down the customer issues into a product market strategy, with a specific focus on the cultural fit in the tradition of strategic group thinking. The sixth article, by Martin et al. (2011), adopts a different twist on the study of organization theory within the realm of marketing by looking at institutional pressures and marketing ethics initiatives. Their article utilizes the theoretical foundation of organizational identity in the quest for better understanding the phenomena studied. Likewise, the last article in the issue uses organizational identity as a theoretical lens to study franchise branding. This article by Zachary and four of his colleagues (2011) entrenches itself in the marketing channel by looking at certain franchise systems and issues.

The Chan and Lam (2011) article, included as the second to last in the issue, creates synergy between marketing issues and organization theory via the theoretical perspective of agency theory. In their case, they study the impact of servicing empowerment on employees’ service performance. The blend of organization theory and service issues in a marketing context provides a unique and potentially valuable contribution to the literature.

Conclusion

In describing the state of marketing research three decades ago, Biggadike (1981, p. 631) asserted that “many marketers today are not scientists in the theory-building sense but technological virtuosi in solving problems at a brand or, occasionally, product level.” Across the ensuing decades, theory building within marketing research has advanced dramatically. Currently, the marketing discipline is quite robust in providing theoretical descriptions and predictions, and marketing scholars can rightfully consider themselves to be “scientists.” Although important needs seem to remain within the realm of theoretical explanation, the articles offered in this special issue of *JAMS* demonstrate that significant opportunities to address these needs exist. One way to do so is by building synergies between marketing and organization theory.

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