
Marketing Theory

The Philosophy of Marketing Science

Shelby D. Hunt
Texas Tech University

1983



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Preface to the First Irwin Edition

This edition of *Marketing Theory* is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. That is, it is a natural extension of the 1976 work. The philosophical thrust of the book is still mainstream philosophy of science, and the purpose of the book is still to integrate the philosophy of science with marketing theory and research.

As in the earlier work, I have tried to keep the textual material in this edition as compact as possible. Nevertheless, there are new sections in every chapter and one new chapter, "Theory: Issues and Aspects." The new text material is often introduced to bring the reader up-to-date on recent issues in the philosophy of science. As in the earlier work, I usually take a specific stand on each issue rather than simply listing the positions of different philosophers of science. I believe this procedure to be more conducive to generating analysis and discussion.

A major departure of this edition is the inclusion of selected readings. Hopefully, the readings will make the book a more complete package for marketing theory courses. Unquestionably, instructors will still have to extensively supplement the book with additional readings. Some instructors will want to have students review other materials in the philosophy of science. I am sure that all instructors will want to supplement the book with specific theoretical works in each of the substantive areas of marketing. The particular readings included in this volume often present viewpoints which differ radically from the positions taken in the text. The contrast between the views in the text and the views in the readings should stimulate thoughtful analyses of the issues.

Many people made the preparation of this edition significantly easier. First of all, I should like to thank Richard D. Irwin, Inc., for assuming the risks of publishing it. Second, I should like to acknowledge the support of both the College of Business Administration and the Area of Marketing here at Texas Tech University. My new colleagues have been extremely helpful in encouraging my research efforts in general and my work in marketing theory in particular. Thanks also go to Kent Nakamoto and Carl Stonebraker, two of my former students who helped in the preparation of this edition. Finally,

I should like to thank Teresa Saloga, Lois Bernhardt, and Shirley Lockett for taking the scratchings that I refer to as “handwriting” and transforming them into neatly typed manuscript. Thanks also go to Paul Surgi Speck for preparing the index.

S. D. Hunt
1982

Preface

One of my first professional teaching assignments was to develop materials for a course called Marketing Theory. Relying heavily on a syllabus provided by Bernard J. La Londe (my marketing theory mentor at Michigan State), I gathered a final package of materials that was reasonably representative of the works of contemporary marketing theorists. During the first few weeks of class, both students and instructor floundered about, attempting to rigorously analyze theories in/of marketing. Efforts at rigor were being constantly thwarted by widely disparate perceptions in the marketing literature as to the basic nature of concepts such as theories, laws, hypotheses, models, operational definitions, science, explanation, prediction, axioms, generalizations, and propositions. Since these concepts represented the basic subject matter of the philosophy of science, supplemental articles and books in this area were assigned. Students now had a conceptual framework for analyzing marketing theory.

In subsequent semesters I experimented with a variety of philosophy of science works to provide a foundation for the course, never finding a completely satisfactory package. Students complained that they had difficulty in applying the basic readings to marketing. These complaints prompted the preparation of the present monograph, which attempts to integrate the philosophy of science with marketing theory and research. The emphasis throughout this work is both on developing the conceptual framework and on applying it to marketing.

This monograph is designed to serve as the major text in marketing theory courses. Instructors will find it desirable to supplement it with articles by marketing theorists in the major substantive areas in marketing. The monograph can also provide a conceptual foundation for graduate-level marketing research courses and seminars. Instructors who have used prepublication drafts have indicated that the questions at the end of each chapter serve as useful springboards for class discussion. Marketing practitioners who have a serious interest in research will also find this monograph valuable. However, be advised that it is no cookbook.

Most readers will disagree with some parts of the conceptual framework herein presented. Some readers will disagree with most of it. Such disagreement is welcomed, since one objective of the monograph is to stimulate thoughtful discussion of the fundamental issues

underlying marketing theory and research. I only hope that I have made my positions clear enough to assist critics in their efforts to show where I am in error or where my conclusions are not well thought out. I would rather be found wrong than obtuse.

First on a list of acknowledgments for an effort such as this must be the many philosophers of science whose original works provided the conceptual framework. The writings of six scholars were particularly helpful in guiding my thinking: Richard S. Rudner, Washington University; Carl G. Hempel, Princeton University; Ernest Nagel, Columbia University; Abraham Kaplan, University of Michigan; and Karel Lambert and Gordon G. Brittan, Jr., University of California, Irvine. For reviewing and constructively criticizing various portions of the monograph, I wish to thank William H. Peters, University of Wisconsin, Madison; Robert F. Lusch, University of Oklahoma; and Yusaku Furahashi, University of Notre Dame.

The general support of the Graduate School of Business, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Dean Robert H. Bock is gratefully acknowledged. My colleagues in the Marketing Department deserve my sincere appreciation for both providing the intellectually stimulating atmosphere conducive to a work of this nature and then specifically encouraging my efforts.

Many of my students have made valuable contributions to this effort. Helen D. Jackobs, Judy Harrison, and Anthony Pecotich have been particularly helpful. Finally, I should like to thank the numerous typists who have had the unenviable task of decoding my miserable scrawlings. The efforts of Jeanne Brooks deserve special recognition in this regard.

S. D. Hunt
1975

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Introduction

Question: Prove to me I should study logic!

Answer: How would you know that it was a good proof?

Epictetus

Marketing research books usually contain sections on issues such as experimental research designs, data collection procedures, the availability and desirability of secondary data, sampling methods, data analysis, and the writing of research reports. Since this monograph discusses none of these topics, how can it claim to be about “marketing research”? Most books on *advanced* research topics in marketing discuss items such as factor analysis, multiple discriminant analysis, cluster analysis, multiple regression, dummy variable regression, canonical correlation, and covariance analysis. Since the page numbers represent the most sophisticated use of quantitative tools in this monograph, why have graduate students referred to this work as *advanced* issues in marketing research? Finally, students often describe most contemporary works on marketing theory as “impractical,” with no relevance to the real world. How can this monograph concern marketing theory and further assert that the study of theory is the most *practical* intellectual pursuit of anyone seriously interested in marketing research? Is this entire monograph an inherent contradiction in terms? Let’s examine these contradictions and determine whether they are real or only apparent.

1.1 THREE CONTRADICTIONS?

Few students of marketing would deny that much marketing research attempts to explain, predict, and understand marketing phenomena. Thus, much research is directed at explaining why some products have failed and attempting to predict which new products will succeed; explaining why certain retail institutions have declined and predicting which retail institutions will emerge; explaining why some promotional programs have succeeded and predicting the characteristics of successful future programs; and explaining why con-

sumers have allocated their vast expenditures according to certain patterns and predicting how consumers will purchase in the future. Thus, explanation, prediction, and understanding are fundamental to marketing research.

Care should be taken to distinguish between *marketing* research and *market* research. Marketing research (or, alternatively, scholarly research in marketing) always seeks to expand the total knowledge base of marketing. In general, market research attempts to solve a particular company's marketing problem. To evaluate a particular department store's image would be a market research problem. To explore whether department stores have images *at all* is a marketing (scholarly) research problem. To attempt to determine the best location for a particular warehouse is a market research problem. To attempt to develop a model for locating warehouses *in general* is a marketing research problem. The following question can serve as a litmus test for differentiating market research from marketing research: "After conducting this research project, what will we then know about marketing *in general* that we do not know now?" In short, "What will be the contribution of this research to knowledge about marketing?" Unfortunately, many dissertation research proposals and even some completed dissertations fail this test. Although the line differentiating marketing research from market research may sometimes be fine, the distinction is useful and conceptually important.

Myers, Massy, and Greyser [308a] have drawn similar distinctions among basic research, problem-solving research, and what they refer to as "problem-oriented" research. They suggest that problem-oriented research lies between basic research and problem-solving research and "may be fundamental or highly applied, but its driving force is the desire to make a contribution to the solution of an important practical problem." [308b, p. 157] Does problem-oriented research "lie between" basic research and problem-solving research? If "basic" research is considered to be roughly synonymous with "marketing" research and "problem-solving" research is considered to be roughly synonymous with "market" research, then problem-oriented research is *not* "between" the two. Problem-oriented research is a subclass of *marketing* research because it is research directed at general *classes* of marketing problems and because it is generalizable *across* different firms. Problem-oriented research is, simply, a kind of basic research in marketing that is normative-driven rather than positive-driven (see Section 1.3.1). It seeks answers to normative questions such as "How *should* retail establishments price their merchandise?" rather than answers to positive questions such as "How *do* retail establishments price their merchandise?" Both questions are appropriate for "basic" or "marketing" research.

The first apparent contradiction dissolves if we note that this monograph is substantially concerned with exploring the basic methodological issues attendant on the explanation, prediction, and understanding of marketing phenomena. These basic methodological issues are

customarily given only cursory treatment, at best, in most marketing research texts. Such texts focus primarily (and probably justifiably, given their target markets) on the conventional topics previously mentioned (data collection, sampling, etc.). Fortunately for the present endeavor, many of the basic methodological issues in research and scientific inquiry have been extensively developed in the philosophy of science and are applicable to marketing research. *The major purpose of this monograph will be to draw upon the vast storehouse of analytical methods in the philosophy of science in order to systematically explore the basic methodological issues underlying marketing research.* The philosophical orientation of the monograph can be described as a blend of logical empiricism and realism, the two perspectives that dominate current philosophy of science.

The second apparent contradiction is (a) that “advanced” topics in marketing research universally seem to be quantitatively sophisticated and (b) quantitative techniques are conspicuous by their absence in this monograph, yet (c) students who have previewed this work generally consider it advanced. The contradiction is illusory. Quantitative techniques represent a tool kit for conducting research. Many mathematical and statistical models are difficult to understand and, hence, *advanced*. Similarly, the philosophy of science is a tool kit which students may perceive as being relatively advanced. Students may find the tool kit of moderate difficulty for two reasons. First, few students have been formally exposed to the philosophy of science, and the first exposure to new material is always the most difficult. The reader must not only comprehend the *substance* of the tool kit but must also learn the *vocabulary*. Every effort has been made to “de-jargonize” the presentation. Nevertheless, just as students must understand such terms as *differentiation* and *integration* to learn the role of calculus in marketing research, so must they understand such terms as *retrodiction* and *deductive-nomological explanation* to appreciate the usefulness of the philosophy of science tool kit in marketing research.

Some marketing commentators have observed that the history of marketing (not unlike the history of other social sciences) can be best understood as a history of marketing fads. Every few years some group comes along with a tool kit which promises to be the key to marketing problems. Thus, marketing has been blessed with motivation research, operations research, Markov processes, systems analysis, the behavior sciences, mathematical models, multidimensional scaling, psychographics, conjoint analysis, structural equation models, and multiattribute models. Although each tool kit has value in conducting research in marketing, advocates of the various tool kits often tend to oversell and overpromise. Therefore, a caveat concerning the philosophy of science seems appropriate. Just as marketing research problems are not solved by restating our ignorance in mathematical symbols, so too the present philosophy of science tool kit provides no panaceas, no magic formulas.

The second reason some students may find this presentation moderately difficult is that we shall attempt to rigorously analyze an area (often referred to as “the scientific method”) about which students have some notoriously nonrigorous (though often firmly held) notions. Unfortunately, rigor and difficulty often travel in tandem. If the analysis is both complete and clear (rigorous), this will maximize the opportunity for others to point out errors. When analyses are incomplete and ambiguous, the temptation is often strong for authors to dismiss their errors as misinterpretations. Since ambiguity should never be confused with profundity, I plead guilty to the charge of attempted rigor.

The last apparent contradiction is that (a) students believe that theory is impractical, yet (b) this book concerns theory while (c) claiming to be devoted to a practical intellectual pursuit. The fallacy lies in the false dichotomy of *theoretical–practical*. Almost all marketing practitioners, most marketing academicians, and, sadly, too many marketing researchers perceive *theoretical* and *practical* as being at the opposite ends of a continuum. This perception leads to the conclusion that as any analysis becomes more theoretical, it must become less practical. To puncture this misperception, one need only note that *a theory is a systematically related set of statements, including some lawlike generalizations, that is empirically testable. The purpose of theory is to increase scientific understanding through a systematized structure capable of both explaining and predicting phenomena.* Thus, any structure which purports to be theoretical must be capable of explaining and predicting phenomena. Any structure that has neither explanatory nor predictive power is not a theory. Since the explanation and prediction of marketing phenomena are eminently practical concerns, the study and generation of marketing theory are practical pursuits of the first order.

The *theoretical–practical* issue is not the only false dichotomy in marketing. Consider the *behavioral–quantitative* classification. Incredibly, some marketing educators still inquire of prospective faculty whether they are quantitative *or* behavioral. This false dichotomy automatically presumes that no one can be both behaviorally oriented and at the same time well grounded in quantitative methodology. The presumption is, of course, unfounded.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF MONOGRAPH

The primary objective here will be to systematically explore some of the basic methodological issues underlying marketing research. The analytical methods that will be developed and employed will be drawn from the tool kit of the philosophy of science and will largely reflect the contemporary empiricist and realist schools of modern writers. Numerous other tool kits exist in the philosophy of science: classical empiricism, pragmatism, phenomenism, rationalism, instrumentalism, logical positivism, conventionalism, and, recently,

“*Weltanschauungen-ism.*” The differentiating characteristics of these various “isms” need not detain us, since this work is not *on* the philosophy of science, but rather, attempts to *use* it. This is not a philosophy of science book disguised in the trappings of marketing research. Much of the philosophy of science is not even mentioned, let alone developed, in this work. Philosophy of science issues and methods are introduced and discussed only when they are deemed useful for explicating some particular methodological issue in marketing research.

One way to clarify the purpose of this work is to give some examples of the basic methodological issues that will be explored. Although certainly not exhaustive, the following list should prove reasonably representative of these issues:

1. How does one scientifically explain marketing phenomena?
2. Is it possible to be able to explain marketing phenomena without being able to predict them?
3. Is functionalism a different method of explaining phenomena?
4. How does explanation differ from causation?
5. Can one understand marketing phenomena without being able to explain or predict them?
6. What is the role of laws and lawlike generalizations in marketing research?
7. How do empirical generalizations differ from laws?
8. Are the axioms in a theory “assumed to be true”?
9. Can Weber’s law be extended to marketing phenomena?
10. How do universal laws differ from statistical laws?
11. What is theory, and what is its role in marketing research?
12. How can formalization help in analyzing marketing theory?
13. Why must theories contain lawlike generalizations?
14. Why must theories be empirically testable?
15. How can marketing phenomena best be classified?

Before analyzing these questions, some preliminary matters require attention. These preliminary issues can be best examined in the context of the so-called “Is marketing a science?” controversy. The controversy was sparked by an early *Journal of Marketing* article by Converse entitled “The Development of a Science of Marketing.” [92] Prominent writers who then entered the debate included Bartels, Hutchinson, Baumol, Buzzell, Taylor, and Halbert. [25, 216, 39, 74, 402, 174] After raging throughout most of the 1950s and 1960s, the controversy has since (apparently) waned. The waning may be more apparent than real because many of the substantive issues underlying the marketing science controversy overlap with the more recent “broadening the concept of marketing” debate. Fundamental to both controversies are some radically different perspectives on the essential characteristics of both *marketing* and *science*. An exploration of the basic nature of both these notions will provide a frame of reference for the rest of this monograph.