

John A. Quelch and Katherine E. Jocz

Milestones in Marketing

We invited John Quelch and Katherine Jocz, authors of Greater Good: How Good Marketing Makes for Better Democracy (2008), to discuss some of the articles they found most interesting and important from the past half-century of marketing journals.

Marketing flourished in U.S. business schools in the prosperous years following World War II. Students preparing for assistant-product-manager positions at the likes of Procter & Gamble, Lever, and General Foods enrolled in courses in marketing management, management of promotion, marketing research, sales management, distribution, and cost accounting. A business-practice perspective, which views marketing as a means for achieving an individual firm's objectives, came to dominate textbooks and curricula. Allied to this perspective was marketing's role in managing the buyer, or demand, side of market exchanges. For example, Jerome McCarthy, in the first edition of his influential textbook, stated: "marketing is the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer or user in order to best satisfy consumers and accomplish the firm's objectives."¹

As the marketing field matured in the 1950s and 1960s, it articulated a set of foundational concepts. Increasingly, in theory and practice, marketers embraced the idea that they were not simply selling core product functionality but were also offering an augmented set of benefits. They were not selling just goods and services but were also offering solutions to customer problems.² With this shift in focus, the nature of the buying decision by consumers and business customers came under closer scrutiny. Marketing researchers paid closer attention to

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¹E. Jerome McCarthy, *Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach* (Homewood, Ill., 1960).

²For instance, Theodore Levitt said, in a widely quoted article, "Selling is preoccupied with the seller's need to convert his product into cash; marketing with the idea of satisfying the needs of the customer by means of the product and the whole cluster of things associated with creating, delivering, and finally consuming it," Theodore Levitt, "Marketing Myopia," *Harvard Business Review* 61 (July–Aug. 1960): 50.

the psychological and emotional—as opposed to strictly functional—types of “utility” consumers gain from using products and services.

In the 1950s, marketing theorists also began to claim a greater role for marketing in the management of firms. Management expert Peter Drucker stated, in 1954, “Fifty years ago the typical attitude of the American businessman towards marketing was that the sales department will sell whatever the plant produces. Today [their view] . . . is increasingly: . . . It is our job to produce what the market needs.”³ Following Drucker’s lead, the “marketing concept” asserted that, above all, firms must create value for customers and see the business from the customer’s point of view. This “customer orientation” vied with alternatives such as manufacturing, research and development, sales, or finance. Proponents tended to view the acceptance and implementation of the marketing concept as the final, and highest, stage in a firm’s evolutionary progress.⁴ Although the concept was rarely fully adopted, it helped to elevate the topic of customers’ interests within management thinking.

In addition to these core concepts, leading marketing educators and practitioners forged a robust set of theories, tools, and empirical knowledge. Borrowing freely from other disciplines, they tackled a wide array of business issues. The scope of the field both deepened and broadened. To illustrate this evolution of marketing thinking, and practice, we have selected five seminal contributions to the literature, authored by Wendell R. Smith, Neil Borden, Philip Kotler, Paul E. Green, and Theodore Levitt.

Some common threads run through these selections. All five authors received doctorates in economics but were initially attracted to the issues facing practicing marketers. The ideas they advocated in these articles were not “breakthroughs,” in the sense of being new to the world. Rather, the authors’ forcefulness and clarity of expression enabled these ideas to break through the prevailing mindset and point the way to fruitful new directions. In some cases, what they had to say was controversial, but in each case, the impact of their work in advancing the field was recognized soon after publication. Their ideas shape the practice of marketing today.

Wendell Smith, “Product Differentiation and Market Segmentation as Alternative Marketing Strategies” (1956)

As early as 1900, some firms chose to differentiate their products in order to do a better job of satisfying customers’ diverse needs.⁵ While

³Peter F. Drucker, *The Practice of Management* (New York, 1954), 38.

⁴Robert J. Keith, “The Marketing Revolution,” *Journal of Marketing* 24 (Jan. 1960): 35–38.

⁵Frederick E. Webster Jr., “The Role of Marketing and the Firm,” in *Handbook of Marketing*, ed. Barton Weitz and Robin Wensley (London, 2002), 66–82.

Henry Ford was famous for his vision of the Model T as a standard product (offered in “any color you want so long as it’s black”) and affordable to the broadest possible market, General Motors under Alfred Sloan offered “a car for every purse and purpose” (from Chevrolet to Cadillac). Owing to the huge size of the American market, GM’s differentiation strategy was, in a sense, like Ford’s, a mass-market strategy incorporating mass production, high volume, and modest unit profit margins.

Generally, in the early post–World War II years, a mass-marketing strategy prevailed. Then, in 1956, Wendell Smith, of the research firm Alderson & Sessions, published an article in the *Journal of Marketing* (*JM*) entitled “Product Differentiation and Market Segmentation as Alternative Marketing Strategies.” Smith advocated employing market segmentation in addition to product differentiation as closely related instruments to stimulate demand, create product preference, and improve marketing efficiency and effectiveness.⁶ By product differentiation, Smith meant “giving the marketer a horizontal share of a broad and generalized market.” By market segmentation, he meant a new, more precise approach that “tends to produce depth of market position in the segments that are effectively defined and penetrated.”⁷ In effect, segmentation divides up a market into smaller, homogeneous markets that differ in product preference. Marketers also seek segments whose members respond to advertising, promotion, and other marketing instruments in similar ways.

As Smith noted, segmentation had become a feasible strategy in the mid-1950s for two reasons: the development of more flexible production techniques and the conditions of prosperity that allowed consumers to pay a little more to get closer to what they wanted. Technological and methodological advances in collecting and analyzing market data were also crucial to executing differentiation and segmentation strategies.

In subsequent years, the marketing discipline developed increasingly sophisticated tools for competitive positioning, target-market segmentation, and product-line strategy. Twenty-two years after Smith’s article, the *Journal of Marketing Research* published a special section on segmentation research to assess the state of the art. The editor noted that, by then, methodological developments and applications of segmentation had proliferated widely in the field (although perhaps owing to proprietary concerns, the literature contained relatively few reports on how results of segmentation research were used by management).⁸

⁶Wendell R. Smith, “Product Differentiation and Market Segmentation as Alternative Marketing Strategies,” *Journal of Marketing* 21 (July 1956): 3–8.

⁷*Ibid.*, 5.

⁸Yoram Wind and Wendell R. Smith, “Introduction to Special Section on Market Segmentation Research,” *Journal of Marketing Research* 15 (Aug. 1978): 315–16.

However, segmentation was not without difficulties or controversy. Marketers could not always find bases for segments that differed in product preference and were easy to reach. As recently as 2001, a vigorous debate in *Marketing Research* disputed the view that segmentation had ever provided a basis for successful marketing strategies.⁹ Sometimes lost in the numerous evocations of Smith's article over the years are its important nuances. He insisted that the goal of differentiation and segmentation is always to minimize the joint costs of production and marketing. Moreover, he emphasized market dynamism; in a rational marketing strategy, the degree of diversity may need to vary over time, and, depending upon market conditions, the two strategies may have to be applied either together or sequentially. Indisputably, however, his article ushered in an era of increasing market segmentation.

Neil H. Borden, "The Concept of the Marketing Mix" (1964)

Within firms, the boundaries of marketing proved to be fuzzy, in large part because customer issues cut across many different aspects of a firm's activities. Marketing often overlapped with, and sometimes subsumed, strategy, sales, supply-chain management, operations (especially in service businesses), product design, and public relations. In many non-consumer-oriented companies, marketing's role was simply to provide support for sales.

In 1964, Neil H. Borden's classic article entitled "The Concept of the Marketing Mix," which appeared in the *Journal of Advertising Research*, cataloged the interrelated managerial decisions falling within the marketing domain. As professor of advertising—as opposed to marketing—at Harvard Business School, Borden was perhaps not the obvious person to group many business functions under marketing. However, his teaching and case-study research convinced him that advertising was but one element of the total marketing program and that, in analyzing advertising returns, it was always essential to ask what the overall marketing strategy was: "What combination of marketing procedures and policies has been or might be adopted to bring about desired behavior of trade and consumers at costs that will permit a profit? . . . [in] the market conditions under which they operate."¹⁰

The bulk of the article's content is a checklist of a dozen ingredients, and subingredients, for marketing managers, encompassing: (1) product planning; (2) pricing; (3) branding; (4) channels of distri-

⁹Michel Wedel et al., "Back Talk," *Marketing Research* 13 (July 2001): 43–47.

¹⁰Neil H. Borden, "The Concept of the Marketing Mix," *Journal of Advertising Research* 4 (June 1964): 2–7, 3.

bution; (5) personal selling; (6) advertising; (7) promotions; (8) packaging; (9) display; (10) servicing; (11) physical handling; and (12) fact-finding and analysis. However, the list is not a recipe; it does not tell managers what to do. Borden considered marketing during his time to be more art than science, with little generalizability across businesses. Depending on a firm's resources and on forces such as consumers' buying behavior, trade behavior, competitive activity, and government regulations, successful marketers found their own profitable combination of ingredients.

What, then, accounts for the enduring impact of the article? Borden tells us that he had used the phrase "marketing mix" in his teaching for about fifteen years before writing the essay. "I have always found it interesting to observe how an apt or colorful term may catch on, gain wide usage, and help to further understanding of a concept that has already been expressed in less appealing and communicative terms."¹¹ True to his experience, the term quickly caught on in the wider marketing community. Now, the marketing-mix concept is nearly always used in conjunction with the famous "four *Ps*" categories—product, price, place, and promotion—originated by E. Jerome McCarthy to classify marketing tools in his 1960 textbook.¹² Many subsequent authors have suggested modifications to the mix and to the four *Ps*, but the basic framework survives in contemporary textbooks and is generally accepted as an apt description of elements the marketing manager can control in order to influence buyers. It also is a reminder of the extent to which marketing decisions are intertwined with sales, production, and other functional areas of the firm. And Borden's marketing mix, unlike the four *Ps*, includes market research, tests, and measurement as key components of marketing management.

Philip Kotler and Sidney J. Levy, "Broadening
the Concept of Marketing" (1969)

As marketers grew confident in their ability to manage exchanges with, and create value for, businesses and consumers, some saw opportunities to extend the marketing approach to other domains. Northwestern University marketing professor Philip Kotler emerged as a leading proponent of applying marketing concepts and approaches to nonbusiness entities with the publication of two articles in *JM* that concisely and vividly presented the case: "Broadening the Concept of Marketing," which he coauthored with Sidney J. Levy in 1969, was

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² McCarthy, *Basic Marketing*.

followed, in 1972, by “A Generic Concept of Marketing,” which he wrote on his own.¹³

In these articles, Kotler argued that the principles of “good” marketing are transferable to government agencies, nonprofits, political parties, charities, and individuals; ideas and services; and virtually every context involving exchange and relationship activities. Every organization has the equivalent of a product, suppliers, and consumers and counterparts to product improvement, pricing, distribution, and communication. Marketing fits in because “[it] is that function of the organization that can keep in constant touch with the organization’s consumers, read their needs, develop ‘products’ that meet these needs, and build a program of communications to express the organization’s purposes.” Moreover, “the choice facing those who manage nonbusiness organizations is not whether to market or not to market, for no organization can avoid marketing. The choice is whether to do it well or poorly.”¹⁴

On the other side of the coin, Kotler hoped that untethering marketing from commercial uses would refute accusations by critics like Vance Packard, author of *The Hidden Persuaders*, that marketing was immoral and self-seeking, and that it made people buy things they didn’t want or that were bad for them.¹⁵ As well as enhancing the stature of the field, the new associations represented a chance for marketers to expand their thinking and their skills and to bring in new issues and concepts.¹⁶

Within the academic world, the 1969 article proved surprisingly controversial. A number of marketing scholars argued that extending marketing to new, nonbusiness, domains would weaken the discipline.¹⁷ Eventually, the debate subsided, leaving a majority of educators in favor of broadening the scope of marketing’s application.¹⁸ Subsequently, Kotler and others authored books on social, educational, cultural, health, celebrity, church, and locale marketing. Increasingly, executives of arts organizations, churches, social agencies, and other nonprofits, although not always comfortable with the “marketing” label, have accepted that

¹³ Philip Kotler and Sidney J. Levy, “Broadening the Concept of Marketing,” *Journal of Marketing* 33 (Jan. 1969): 10–15; Philip Kotler, “A Generic Concept of Marketing,” *Journal of Marketing* 36 (Apr. 1972): 46–54.

¹⁴ Kotler and Levy, “Broadening the Concept of Marketing,” 15.

¹⁵ Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York, 1957).

¹⁶ Kotler, “A Generic Concept of Marketing.”

¹⁷ For example, see David Luck, “Broadening the Concept of Marketing—Too Far,” *Journal of Marketing* 33 (July 1969): 53–54.

¹⁸ Philip Kotler, “The Role Played by the Broadening of Marketing Movement in the History of Marketing Thought,” *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* 24 (Spring 2005): 114–16.

marketing can help to create a unique identity, promote a message, attract audiences or donors, and influence desired behaviors. Modern politicians have become fluent in marketing research and segmentation, targeting, and positioning (skills that do not always redound to the credit of marketing).

Paul E. Green, Articles on Conjoint Analysis (1971–78)

Lacking formal entry requirements (unlike law or accounting), the marketing discipline was, and remains, eclectic. The field adopted perspectives from, and attracted practitioners and academics trained in, the social sciences (economics, anthropology, sociology, psychology), the “hard” sciences (mathematics, operations research, computer science), and “creative” disciplines (art and design, liberal arts, literary criticism). Receptivity to quantitative methodologies grew after the late 1950s, when a critique of managerial training in business schools issued by the Ford Foundation called for more scientific rigor and less work of a simply descriptive nature. In the 1960s and 1970s, marketing faculty trained in mathematical modeling and decision-making or in the experimental social sciences exerted a strong influence on the discipline.

The history of conjoint analysis is representative. The conjoint method helps managers understand why consumers prefer one product or supplier over another, and it is now the most widely used method in marketing for analyzing choice tradeoffs. In addition to predicting overall preference, it is particularly useful in estimating price-demand tradeoffs or tradeoffs among product features or elements of the marketing mix, and it can be applied to product design, pricing, positioning, and market segmentation.

Conjoint analysis was introduced to marketing by the Wharton School marketing professor Paul E. Green. Green was inspired to apply conjoint measurement to marketing problems after reading a seminal 1964 article in the *Journal of Mathematical Psychology* by R. Duncan Luce and John Tukey.¹⁹ His first paper on the conjoint method, dealing with consumer judgments, appeared in 1971.²⁰ Thereafter, Green and other researchers painstakingly worked on new applications, methodological refinements, and software programs to harness the computational power of computers.

¹⁹ Paul E. Green, Abba M. Krieger, and Yoram Wind, “Thirty Years of Conjoint Analysis: Reflections and Prospects,” in *Marketing Research and Modeling: Progress and Prospects: A Tribute to Paul E. Green*, ed. Yoram Wind and Paul E. Green (Boston, 2004), 117–39.

²⁰ Paul E. Green and Vithala R. Rao, “Conjoint Measurement for Quantifying Judgmental Data,” *Journal of Marketing Research* 8 (Aug. 1971): 355–63.

In 1975 and 1978, a pair of articles by Green and coauthors called wide attention to the conjoint approach within two important constituents of the marketing community.²¹ The first, “New Way to Measure Consumers’ Judgments,” appeared in the *Harvard Business Review* (*HBR*). Addressing marketing managers in nontechnical language, it describes the overall approach, including benefits and limitations; provides clear examples of useful applications; suggests other possible applications; and reviews the ways conjoint analysis fits in with other research methods. The authors made only modest claims for this method; its appeal to readers derived largely from the examples and proposed applications to the types of marketing problems many of them faced in a marketplace characterized by an increasingly complicated marketing mix.

The 1978 article, “Conjoint Analysis in Consumer Research: Issues and Outlook,” appeared in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (*JCR*). In stark contrast to the *HBR* article, it is a highly technical step-by-step guide to using the conjoint method that walks readers through all the various research-design decisions; it constitutes the equivalent of a graduate seminar. Suggested applicability to consumer research, including applications in business, occurs only toward the end of the article. For marketing researchers, the article was seminal. It became the most frequently cited paper in *JCR* and also one of the top-cited papers ever published in a scholarly marketing journal.

In the 1980s and 1990s, new variants of conjoint analysis were introduced to increase its efficiency, accuracy, and ability to handle complex choices. For example, Green reported applications such as designing the bundle of characteristics offered by the new Courtyard by Marriott hotel chain, by AT&T’s first cellular phone service, and by the New York E-Z Pass automated toll collection system. In the mid-1980s, new software programs for conjoint applications made them easier to use and more affordable. Later on, the Internet facilitated data collection. Altogether, there have been thousands of commercial conjoint studies, and the method continues to attract academic interest.

Theodore Levitt, “The Globalization of Markets” (1983)

As the number of multinational corporations rose in the 1960s and 1970s, practicing marketers confronted a variety of social, cultural,

²¹Paul E. Green and Yoram Wind, “New Way to Measure Consumers’ Judgments,” *Harvard Business Review* 53 (July–Aug. 1975): 107–17; Paul E. Green and V. Srinivasan, “Conjoint Analysis in Consumer Research: Issues and Outlook,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 5 (Sept. 1978): 103–23.

political, and institutional contexts. Little evidence existed on how well U.S.-based marketing theories would hold up in these new arenas, whether American firms could compete successfully for overseas consumer markets, or how marketing management should adapt. Virtually from its inception, *JM* carried regular features on world trade; in the late 1950s, it featured “foreign marketing” abstracts; in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, full-length articles addressed aspects of international marketing.²² Even so, U.S. scholarly work on international marketing up to that point lagged behind practitioner experience.²³

In 1983, an *HBR* article by Harvard Business School professor Theodore Levitt brought new vigor to this relatively neglected topic. “The Globalization of Markets” ignited an ongoing debate by advocating standardized global marketing programs versus the currently accepted norm of local adaptation.²⁴ Among the reasons Levitt advanced for standardization was global convergence in consumers’ preferences: “almost everyone everywhere wants all the things they have heard about, seen, or experienced via the new technologies” [of communication and transportation].²⁵ There is “ubiquity of desire for the most advanced things that the world makes and sells—goods of the best quality and reliability at the lowest price.”²⁶

Levitt also argued that the decentralized multinational corporation that adapts product offerings and marketing programs to local tastes incurs higher costs than the global corporation that treats the whole world as a single entity or, at the most, as a few large regions. As evidence of the benefits of globalizing, he pointed to the success of Japanese firms Honda, Panasonic, and Toyota, which (perhaps out of marketing naiveté) offered high-quality standardized products everywhere. As evidence of the failure of local adaptation, he cited Hoover’s failure in the European washing-machine market.

Levitt’s stark pronouncements sparked controversy on many fronts. For one, he questioned business strategists who believed companies had to choose between a strategic goal of high quality and a strategic goal of low costs, rather than pursuing both simultaneously. With regard to accepted marketing wisdom, Levitt, for the most part, dismisses

²² For instance, Warren J. Keegan, “Multinational Product Planning: Strategic Alternatives,” *Journal of Marketing* 33 (Jan. 1969): 58–62. *Harvard Business Review* published relatively few articles on international markets.

²³ John U. Farley and Jerry Wind, “International Marketing: The Neglect Continues,” *Journal of Marketing* 44 (Summer 1980): 5–6.

²⁴ Theodore Levitt, “The Globalization of Markets,” *Harvard Business Review* 61 (May/June 1983): 92–102.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

the marketing concept; product differentiation and market segmentation; as well as marketing departments and market researchers (the Hoover example was likely a conjoint study). Only as an exception to the rule does he admit that a few elements of the marketing mix, such as distribution and promotional media, may require tailoring to local conditions.

Among marketing leaders, Kotler was one who believed that Levitt was setting back marketing's advance with his proposals for shaping consumer demand to suit production and through his refusal to allow a prominent role for segmentation and tailoring products and marketing to different needs.²⁷ In practice, since Levitt's article came out, many more multinational corporations operate around the world. They have embraced globalization, but not to the extent Levitt argued for. Firms try to standardize what they can, but they usually adapt at least some elements of the marketing mix to local conditions. Levitt undoubtedly underestimated the persistence of cultural and national differences in desires for consumer goods. However, firms today look for local market segments that individually may be too small but that together form a viable global market. This is consistent with Levitt's advice that the global marketer should aggregate segments across the world. Levitt's prescriptions may not have materialized, but his ideas still provide a framework for managers to think about global markets.

Marketing in the Twenty-First Century

The concepts of Smith, Borden, Kotler, Green, and Levitt continue to inform marketing education and research. Their ideas about market segmentation, the marketing mix, marketing for nonbusinesses, market research, and globalization are embedded in business practice. Along with subsequent conceptual advances in marketing, such as customer-relationship management, customer satisfaction, and brand equity, their work has helped establish a rich body of theory and empirical knowledge. In practice, marketing has proved its value in many different settings, including public and nonprofit arenas. At the same time, it is clear that marketing research so far has uncovered no immutable laws. It remains as much art as science.

Within firms, a perennial problem has been the difficulty of measuring the impact of marketing activities on firm profits and shareholder value. Since the mid-1990s, a sizable body of academic work has

²⁷ Philip Kotler, "Global Standardization—Courting Danger," *Journal of Consumer Marketing* (Spring 1986): 13–16.

focused on improving marketing accountability and incorporating the true value of marketing in financial and accounting procedures.²⁸ The marketing mix is continually evolving. New creative tactics and new communications technologies, such as the Internet, add to the complexity of the problem of allocating marketing resources wisely, placing an ever greater premium on both quantitative and artistic capabilities. There is no shortage of similar topics deserving future research.

We characterized the marketing thought of the last fifty years as taking a managerial-practice perspective whose goal was to achieve organizational profits or equivalent objectives. However, a focus on tactics, on ever finer subdivisions of the market, and on methodological rigor may divert attention from questions of marketing's broader impacts on business and society. When marketing first emerged as a distinct discipline in the early 1900s, scholars explicitly considered the role it played in the general economy, particularly regarding distribution functions and the transfer of ownership.²⁹ The role of government in the marketing system received substantial attention in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, reflecting active social and political debates over consumer welfare and the proper balance between moves by the government to restrain business and actions taken to facilitate it. During this period, a number of authors viewed marketing as a societal institution—one that could lead to a better standard of living, an efficient flow of goods to consumers, or a socially beneficial distribution of goods.³⁰

In the past few decades, marketing thought, with some important exceptions, has paid relatively little attention to the relations between marketing and government or marketing and society.³¹ However, particularly with the entry of Western marketers into countries that have different types of economies and political systems, these issues are more salient. Doing business in India, China, and other emerging economies is likely to redefine the function and practice of marketing. As a practical matter, marketing's role in building an economic infrastructure adequate to provide for consumer welfare will become more prominent. In the West itself, growing public concerns about overconsumption of everything from food to fuel, as well as public disgust with corporate scandals, will raise even more questions about marketing's responsibilities and practices.

²⁸ Rajendra K. Srivastava, Tasadduq Shervani, and Liam Fahey, "Market-Based Assets and Shareholder Value: A Framework for Analysis," *Journal of Marketing* 62 (Jan. 1998): 2–18.

²⁹ For example, see Paul T. Cherington, *The Elements of Marketing* (New York, 1920); Paul D. Converse, *Marketing Methods and Policies* (New York, 1921); Fred E. Clark, *Principles of Marketing* (New York, 1923); and Harold H. Maynard, Walter C. Weidler, and Theodore N. Beckman, *Principles of Marketing* (New York, 1927).

³⁰ For example, see Ralph F. Breyer, *The Marketing Institution* (New York, 1934).

³¹ Notably, authors contributing to the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*.

To the generation of marketers who entered the field when we did, some thirty years ago, the marketing thought of the five leaders we have profiled here was revelatory, opening up new directions for research and practice. The field will be refreshed and strengthened if the same intense spirit of inquiry and tough-mindedness these thinkers brought to the field can be applied to contemporary economic and social as well as managerial issues.