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**FEATURE**

**Emergent Themes in Marketing Theory and  
Practice Literature from 1957 to 2015:  
A Systematic Review**

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**Abstract.** *There are concerns that marketing theory is not reflecting marketing practice. In addition, it seems that though marketing graduates may be confident with their marketing theory foundations, they are not as confident about marketing practice imperatives. Such a gap obviously presents challenges for both marketing academics and practitioners alike. Therefore, this study investigates and collates extant studies on marketing theory and practice for underlying themes that can explain this gap. A systematic literature review was conducted. Articles from journals were located from electronic databases and analyzed using thematic analysis. Five major themes and related subthemes were exposed. Consequently 5 major research questions for future research were proposed. The study contributes to theory construction, marketing management decision making, as well as marketing training and teaching.*

**Keywords:** Marketing theory; marketing practice; marketing implementation; literature review; systematic literature review, marketing education, marketing training

**Introduction**

Marketing theory as it is presently taught in business schools is not being fully implemented (Gummesson, 2002; Whittington & Whipp, 1992). In fact, there seems to be a gap between marketing theory (what academicians develop in business schools) and marketing practices (what managers do in the market place). While a

study by Dibb, Simões, and Wensley (2013) concludes that there is relative harmony among marketing practitioner views, content in marketing texts, as well as the views of marketing academics; Ardley (2008) contends that “textbook theories represent a flawed view of the practitioners world” (p. 533). Ardley further contends that there is a gap between marketing theory and marketing practice which is set to widen if there are no changes made to marketing education.

It seems marketing is experiencing a ‘midlife crisis’ which explains why there is a lack of consistency in implementing marketing practices (McCole, 2004; Meldrum, 1996). Stringfellow, Ennis, Brennan, and Harker (2006) concur and highlight that marketing graduates are grounded in marketing theory but lack business and marketing practice imperatives. They also highlight a disconnection between the input from marketing academics compared with employer expectations from marketing graduates. In addition, marketing graduates themselves feel that the knowledge they possess after graduation does not match their work expectations (Stephens, Balan, & Callaghan, 2010). Further, the absence of an understanding of what marketing practice is, as well as its relationship to marketing theory, has disadvantaged the discipline of marketing (Brady & Palmer, 2004).

A review of marketing practice is thus necessary (Brown et al., 2005; Dibb, Simões, & Wensley, 2013). A systematic literature review is one way of reviewing marketing practice so that the disconnection between marketing theory and practice can be further explained. As a result, this study aims to probe and collate the existing knowledge on marketing theory and practice in pursuance of a robust comprehension of the subject and to gain implications for future research. It appears that there are limited studies of this kind on the topic so, the major input from this paper is to give a compressive summary of empirical and conceptual research addressing marketing theory and practice thereby inadvertently shedding light on the gap between theory and practice. The review highlights how emergent themes in marketing practice and marketing theory have evolved over the years thereby shedding more light on the gap. The historical overview of the progression of studies also exposes avenues for future research. Consequently, the following four research questions were addressed:

1. What is the current overall state of marketing theory and practice research?
2. What are the major themes evident in the extant literature on marketing theory and practice?
3. What theoretical perspectives and research streams characterize and define the marketing theory and practice literature?
4. What are the implications for marketing theory and practice research based on the findings?

This systematic literature review culminated in a review of 87 articles published in international peer reviewed journals. The next section presents the study's methodology and the subsequent sections answer the research questions highlighted above.

### **Methodology**

The study employed a systematic literature review based on the guidelines adapted from different authors (Briner & Denyer, 2012; Jonsson & Tolstoy, 2014; Khan, Kunz, Kleijnen, & Antes, 2003) and review techniques adapted from other authorities (Hohenstein, Feisel, & Hartmann, 2014; Mustak, 2014; Mustak, Jaakkola, & Halinen, 2013). The articles were first identified and then analyzed to address the research questions with brevity (Briner & Denyer, 2012). The overview of the systematic review process that was used can be outlined as follows (a) question formulation, (b) location of studies, (c) study selection and evaluation, (d) analysis and synthesis, and (e) reporting the results (Wong, Skipworth, Godsell, & Achimugu, 2012). The data bases that were used were selected on the understanding that they were available and accessible, covered a comprehensive range of marketing related peer-reviewed journals, and the coverage extended throughout the time frame of the publication (Mustak et al., 2013). The following data bases were identified as the sources for the studies to be analyzed: IBM search complete; ABI; as well as Jstor. The key words "marketing practice", "marketing implementation", and "marketing theory" were used during the search.

The article search process comprised two key steps (a) searching the electronic data bases for articles in peer reviewed journals bearing the search words in their title, and (b) sifting through the resultant articles using the search criteria. The title, abstract, introduction, and conclusion of every article was read to determine its relevance to the review. The search excluded thesis and dissertations as well as book reviews and duplicates (Hohenstein et al., 2014; Briner & Denyer, 2012; Mustak et al., 2013). The initial search generated 12, 812 hits from peer reviewed journals. 136 of these were articles which contained the search terms in their title and only these were selected. Finally, 87 articles were considered after removing duplicates, book reviews, as well as dissertations and thesis. 65 of these were from ABI; 1 from ASC; and 14 from Jstor. No time frame restrictions were enforced.

The articles were arranged in line with the results generated by the search words; that is, "marketing theory"; "marketing practice", and "marketing implementation" respectively. The articles were organized in chronological order from newest to oldest. A database with various headings such as "Journal", "Topic", "author(s)", "Year of Publication", "Conceptual/empirical", "Findings", and "Themes" was then

created. Every article was analyzed independently while the details were captured in the database (Mustak et al., 2013). The descriptive characteristics of the articles were analyzed through Microsoft excel and Microsoft word. The articles were analyzed in three categories in line with the search terms “marketing theory”, “marketing practice”, and “marketing implementation” and in line with the research questions.

The themes were identified using guidelines highlighted by Jonsson and Tolstoy, (2014). Themes were selected where the same thread of meaning occurred in different words; similar words, phrases, or repeated sentences; as well as the attached importance placed on different concepts by the author. Both empirical and theoretical criteria were used in the analysis. Both key ideas and their frequency of occurrence were considered. In instances where there were overlaps among themes, the dominant theme was selected and used for labelling (Jonsson & Tolstoy, 2014).

### **Description of the Literature**

This section reveals the overall state of existing studies by outlining various descriptive characteristics of the reviewed articles. Of the 87 articles 49.4 percent were selected using the search terms “marketing theory”, while 41.4 percent and 9.2 percent were from the search words “marketing practice” and “marketing implementation” respectively. Most of the papers were concept papers 68 %, while empirical studies were 32 %. The papers were spread between 1957 and 2015.

The Journal of Marketing was the dominant publication (25.3%); followed by the European Journal of Marketing (10.3 %); Journal of Historical Research in Marketing (8%); Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice (5.7 %); Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing (4.6 %); Journal of Marketing Research (4.6 %); Journal of Academy of Marketing Science (3.4%); with the rest of spread among the other journals (38.1 %).

### **Themes Covered in Extant Literature**

The articles selected into the database were compared, contrasted, and critically evaluated. In order to expose the insights from the existing literature, dominant emergent themes were identified in the extant literature before a holistic analytical framework was developed (Hohenstein et al., 2014). Inductive thematic analysis of the articles brought five themes to the fore. Three of the themes were supported by subthemes while the remaining two were largely independent. The identified themes were common among articles generated by the three search criteria. The themes also reflect how the discipline of marketing theory and practice has evolved over the years from the 1950’s to date while explaining the disparity between marketing theory and

practice. The next section discusses themes and the sub themes are illustrated in Table 1.

**Theme 1: Formal Marketing Theory**

This theme outlines the quest for the development of formal marketing theory and practice right from the infancy years in the 1950's to date. This theme is informed by six subthemes characterizing the literature: (a) initial quest for formal marketing theory, (b) initial standards for acceptable marketing theory, (c) standards for marketing research, (d) philosophical orientations in marketing theory and practice, (e) further development of marketing theory and practice, as well as (f) components of marketing practice.

Self-evident as it sounds, it is apparent from the review that formal marketing theory as it viewed today is the product of years of development. That development is not only of interest to scholars interested in the history of marketing, but also may shed light on the gap between marketing theory and marketing practice. The review evinces the early attempts to establish formal marketing theory.

The development of formal marketing theory required standards. After noting the need for formal marketing theory, it is understandable that the next thing to be discussed pertains to the standards of the envisaged formalized marketing theory. Early studies point to the efforts made for the search of standards in marketing.

The issue of standards remains a divisive issue in marketing. There is a prescriptive perspective on one end and a fluid social constructionist perspective on the other. As evinced in the discussion on theme 5 below, the teaching of marketing has tended to be prescriptive, however debate on the two perspectives is set to continue into the foreseeable future. The review shows glimpses of the debates and issues that transpired around the area of standards in marketing theory and practice. The continued debates thus explain in part the marketing theory and marketing practice detachment by exposing a maturing discipline.

Besides the focus on the standards in marketing, there seems to be a clear focus on acceptable standards in marketing research in the literature. This discussion on standards in marketing research also contributed to the building of a formal marketing discipline.

The theme on the initial quest for formal marketing theory is also supported by the discussions on philosophical orientations that are observable in the literature. Philosophy informs practice. The absence of consensus on the ideal philosophy is not only apparent but also expected. It likewise points to continued debate on marketing theory and practice based on competing paradigms. It seems that

contributions to marketing theory and practice can be associated with particular philosophical orientations. For example, positivists tend to proffer more prescriptive solutions while for example social constructionists tend to suggest more relative solutions. It seems evident that, even though social constructionists and related paradigms are making inroads, positivist perspectives still rule the roost in the extant studies that were reviewed.

Following the inception of attempts to formalize the discipline of marketing the discussions in extant studies point to the continuing thrust to advance the discipline of marketing. To begin with, even though there are divergent views on marketing theory, it is evident that the discipline has developed and continues to grow. Overall, it is to be expected that multiple and divergent themes were explored. The issues highlighted evince the continuing debates and contributions on formalizing the discipline of marketing. The issues characterizing the growth of formal marketing theory seem to be distinct from the initial efforts to build a formal marketing discipline highlighted above. This continuing growth in marketing theory explains the marketing theory marketing practice divide. It seems that marketing practice may have to continuously play catch up with marketing theory or vice versa since both theory and practice are growing.

Several components of marketing practice were revealed by the review. Such components are of special interest to marketing practitioners. The discussion illustrates some of the issues pertaining to the development of formal marketing theory as well as practice. The formalization of marketing theory and practice should naturally culminate in a comprehensive framework for marketing practice. Thus, the development of the contemporary marketing practice (CMP) framework is a step in the right direction.

### **Theme 2: Dynamic Nature of Marketing Thought and Practice**

The extant literature points to the dynamic nature of marketing thought and practice. This theme is informed by three subthemes (a) transient nature of marketing thought and practice, (b) social context roots of marketing theory and practice, as well as (c) the divergence of marketing theory and practice.

Several debates in the extant studies highlight the transitory nature of marketing. This transient nature of marketing as well as the social context roots could be one the pieces of the marketing theory and practice gap jigsaw. If marketing is rooted in its social contexts, which are diverse and transitory, then it is logical that the multiple contexts dictate multiple standards of both theory and practice. It also implies that the gap between marketing theory and practice is expected.

The social context roots of social marketing can be explored independently as a subtheme explaining the theme of the dynamism of marketing theory and practice. It seems that the foundation of marketing dynamism is rooted in the dynamism of society. If society is diverse, how then can marketing theory or practice be identical?

The review also reveals divergence in marketing theory and practice. The discussions on the absence of a universal definition on marketing; the effect of socio economic cultures as well as economic structures; the distinct imperatives for small firms; the unique nature of marketing practices in Russia; and the observation that marketing practice co-evolves with the firm, all point to the divergence of marketing theory and practice. If marketing is a social science it seems logical to expect it to be fluid and transient. The sophistication of marketing theory is also suggested as one of the causes of the gap between marketing theory and practice. Thus, the review confirmed and helped to explain a growing gap between marketing theory and practice.

### **Theme 3: Changing Role of Marketing in Organizations**

The role of marketing is changing notably within organizations. This theme is explained through two subthemes: (a) declining and changing role of marketing in organizations and (b) the unique role played by internal marketing and human resources management in marketing theory and practice.

Existing studies suggest that the role of marketing is declining especially at decision-making levels. This is an important theme raised by the review. It testifies to the 'midlife' crisis alluded to earlier. One of the recommendations outline in the review was that marketing should have 'cross functional readability'. Such a cross functional dynamic may mean that the control of marketing activities and action plans would need to be revised as they would transcend the organization. It also has implications for marketing training. Probably part of the solution lies in treating marketing in a manner resembling total quality management (TQM). The implication is that, aside from its transactional aspects, marketing should be treated as an organization wide culture just as quality principles ought to be embedded in all organizational functions be it production or finance.

The role of internal marketing in marketing theory and practice is apparent in the extant studies. This means that marketing should be studied in more detail so that its role in the organizations can be clarified. Without that, its relevance in the organization is in danger. The specific relationship between human resources management and internal marketing or marketing in general has not been clearly laid out. However, interfaces between the two functions were confirmed. The cross functional nature of marketing needs to be investigated further.

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The suggested cross functional nature of marketing as well as the observed overlaps between human resources and internal marketing are subthemes explaining the changing role of marketing in organizations. This changing role also points to the current relationship between marketing theory and marketing practice. A resolution on these issues on the changing role of marketing should narrow the gap between marketing theory and practice.

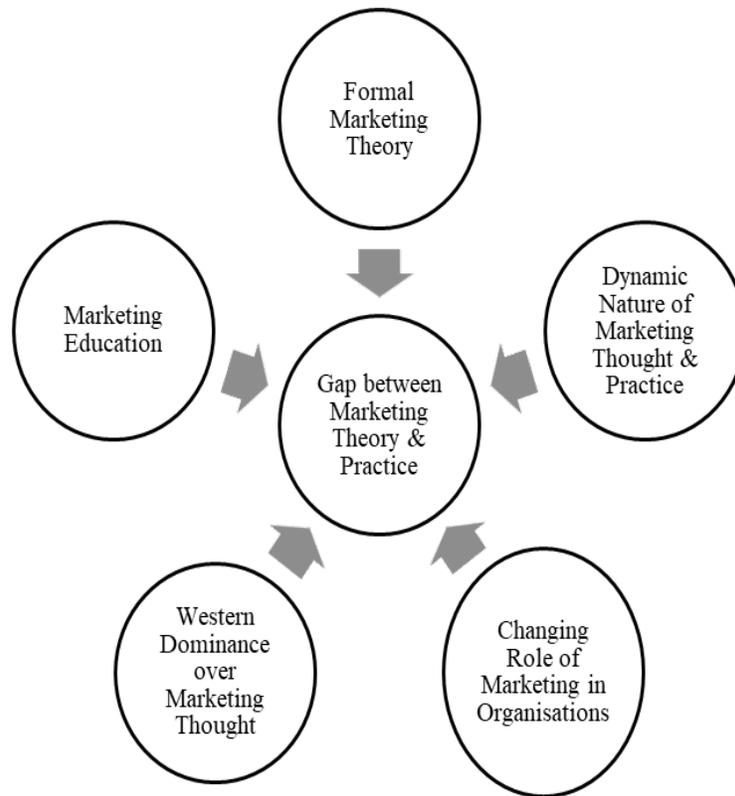
**Theme 4: Dominance of Marketing Theory by the West Especially the USA**

This theme suggests that most world regions lag the US in their contribution of marketing theory and practice. The different regions of the world do not seem to make equitable contributions to the development of marketing thought. It was suggested that the dominance has resulted in the extension of models which may not apply to the rest of the other regions. It was interesting to note that individuals rather than communities as units of analysis are examples of how western thought and practice is being extended. Several communities around the world are communal and not individualistic.

The discussions on this theme pose a question then, on the untapped contributions that may come from other world regions in terms of marketing thought. It can be suggested that marketing scholars in different world regions should make deliberate efforts to give their perspective on marketing theory and practice. More importantly, the missing voices in marketing theory may also help to explain the gap with marketing practice.

**Theme 5: Marketing Education**

This theme highlights the role of marketing education in shaping marketing theory and practice. The studies suggest that marketing education has an important role to play in marketing theory and practice. Outdated theories, teachers without marketing practice experience, as well as prescriptive pedagogy are some of the issues characterizing the review. Thus, the appraisal of marketing education seems foregone conclusion considering themes 1, 2, 3, and 4 above. It is evident that the role of marketing education needs to be reviewed considering its apparent impact on marketing theory and practice. It seems that marketing education can help to bridge the division between marketing theory and practice or at least explain it.



*Figure 1. Analytical Framework*

Table 1  
Emergent Themes & Sub-Themes from Extant Studies

Theme	Sub-theme	Excerpts of Key Ideas	Author(s)
1. Formal marketing theory	1. (a) Formation of Formal Marketing Theory	No agreement on the nature of marketing theory; heightened attention on the development of marketing theory; assessment of the concept of theory; value of theory in simplifying facts; chronicle of issues debated in marketing theory; role of theory in description & not prescription.	Baumol (1957); Bartels (1968); Mount (1969); Ryan, Van 't Spijker, and Brijm (1974); Gaski (1985); Baumol (1986); Whittington & Whipp (1992); Burton (2001); (Gummesson, 2002)
	1. (b) Initial standards of acceptable marketing theory (AIT)	Characteristics of good theory; need to adhere to marketing theory standards; scientific status of marketing as well as criteria for good standards in marketing; extension of marketing to non-business fields; perspectives & standards of acceptable theory; historical investigation of marketing practice; perceived risk of services	Baumol (1957); Martindale (1969); Pinson, Angelmar, & Roberto (1972); Hunt (1973); Tucker (1974); Baumol (1986); Verret (1991); Murray (1991)
	1. (c) Standards of acceptable marketing research	Research best practices; objectivity of research; differences in consumers when used in ECNs; importance of case studies; over rating of quantitative research	Peter (1979); Peter (1981); Hunt (1993); Robertshaw and Marr (2005); Robertshaw & Marr (2006); Calhoun, Banasak-Holl, Herald, & Larson (2006) Gummesson, (2002); Little, Brooks, & Palmer (2008)
1. (d) Philosophical orientation of MT	1. (d) Philosophical orientation of MT	Ideal philosophical orientations for marketing research; increased use of qualitative methods	Hunt (1990); Peter (1992); Karzague (1998); Wille, (2001); Gummesson, (2002); Tadjevishi (2014)
	1. (e) Further development of formal MT	Further development of marketing's body of theory; effectiveness of discourse; IT & marketing; export marketing theory; consumer privacy in database marketing; distinctions between small firm marketing & big firm marketing; elements of internal marketing; brand study & consumer behavior; organizational memory & marketing; emergent & continuous marketing theory; paradigmatic stage of marketing; buying center research; international diplomacy & marketing	Baumol (1986); Steimberg & Plank (1990); Randall et al. (1999); Lasco & Zinkhan (1999); Burton (2001); Randall et al. (2004); Brady & Palmer (2004); Larsen (2004); Thomas & Mauer (1997); Friel (1999); Quenter & Kelly (1999); Brady, Soren, & Tozlas (2002); Gilbert & Chou (2003); Brady et al. (2002); Fugate (2007); Neill (2010); Gummesson (2002); Lowe et al. (2004); Apreçila & Straufeld (2010); Jascous & Gergine (2011); Adaschini et al. (2013); Morry & Wilson (1998); Bahas (2014); Stewart & Zinkhan (2006)
2. Dynamic nature of MT&MP	1. (f) Components of marketing practice (MP)	Marketing practice areas; components of marketing strategy; dominance of transactional marketing; drivers of relationships; distinctions among transactional relationship marketing as well as the resultant hybrid; large firm bias of marketing practice	Friel (1999); Bonoma & Crittenden (1988); Brady & Palmer (2004); Wagner & Rafi (2005); Thorpe & Morgan (2007); Mairo (2006); Corvillo et al. (2002); Corvillo et al. (2006)
	2. (g) Transient nature of MT & MP	Changing views on marketing practice; social nature of marketing phenomena; emergent and transient nature of marketing; planning in turbulent markets; need for marketing to respond to older consumers	Bartels (1968); Martindale (1969); Zinkhan & Hirschheim (1992); Sahinial & Jassavalla (2001); Gummesson (2002); Brown et al. (2005); Thompson & Thompson (2009)

Table 1 (continued)

Theme	Sub-theme	Excerpts of Key Ideas	Author(s)
	2. (b) Social context roots Anti-positivism & M: social contexts roots of marketing of MT		Martinselli, (1969); Thompson & Thompson, (2009)
	2. (c) Divergence of MT&MP	Attitudes in different clusters in the population & marketing practice; no universal definition of marketing; transient & emergent nature of marketing practice; marketing specificity to time, culture, & individuals; informal, primitive, and unplanned marketing practices by African, Caribbean & small firms in the UK; diversity in marketing practices between Chinese Small firms in the UK & those in Hong Kong; uniqueness of Russian marketing practices; coevolving of a firm and its marketing practices; pluralism of marketing practice; haphazard and informal implementation of marketing practices by family owned businesses; divergence of strategic marketing practice.	Husted & Pessenier, (1973); Ellis, (2003); Zinkhan & Hirschman, (1992); Percy, (1998); Blankson & Omar, (2002); Sin et al., (2003); Wagner & Rafi, (2005); Torres & Murray, (2000); Murray, O'Driscoll, & Torres, (2002); Corvello, Brodie, Danaher, & Johnston, (2002); Brady & Palmer, (2004); Dibb et al., (2013); Jones & Chudry, (2001); Gilbert & Choi, (2003) (Terzidis & Sanantha, (2011); Subhan, Brooksbank Garland, & Rader, (2015); Thompson & Thompson, (2009)
	2. (d) Growing gap between MT&MP	Growing gap between theory & practice; the sophistication of marketing theory but with limited practical relevance; inefficiency of current marketing 'amotogabood'; gap between marketing practice and marketing academia; value of living in bridging the theory & practice gap.	Trucker, (1974); Day & Wensley, (1983); Zinkhan & Hirschman, (1992); Gemmission, (2002); Dale, (2006); Little, et al., (2008); Brodie, (2010); Wilkinson & Gray, (2007)
	3. Changing role of marketing in the organization	Declining role of marketing at executive level; challenges to the role of marketing; 'cross functional readability' of marketing; future & survival of the marketing discipline.	Howard, (1983); Bonoma & Critchenden, (1988); Percy, (1998); Brown et al., (2005); Dibb et al., (2013)
	3. (a) Declining and changing role of marketing in the organization	Internal marketing and human resources management interface and overlaps; cross functional readability; contribution to marketing by other resources management in organizational functions.	Quester & Kelly, (1999); Brown et al., (2005); Gowaris, (2008); Dibb, Simoes, and Wensley, (2013);
	3. (b) Role of internal marketing & human resources management in organizational functions.		
	4. Dominance of Marketing theory by the west especially the USA	US hegemony on marketing thought; emerging consumer markets are under researched; research on collective rather than individual units; western interpretation of marketing is not necessarily universal; inappropriateness of most research instruments in some emerging consumer markets	(Gemmission, (2002); Sin et al., (2003); Brown et al., (2005); Chipp, Corde, & Kapelians, (2012); Gilbert and Choi (2003); Calhoun, Banzask-Holt, Hearld, & Larson, (2006); Yaman and Steakumar(2015); Sutton-Brady, Voola, & Yksal (2010)
	5. Marketing education	Marketing education informs marketing practice; redundancy of content in marketing text books; marketing is taught as a science but is closer to historical investigation; need for marketing education to reflect marketing practice; review of marketing course content and pedagogy; necessity of teaching history of marketing; need to eliminate 'combie theories'	Hawkins & Coganogluar, (1972); Ryan et al (1974); Burton, (2001); Gemmission (2002); Jones & Chudry, (2001); Brady & Palmer, (2004); Brown et al., (2005); Woodliscroft & Lawson, (2010); Dale, (2006); Dixon, (2011); Dibb et al., (2013); Jack Rothfeld, (2014); Wilkinson (2011); Hunt (2010); McGarr, (2011); Polonsky & Raiser, (2012)

### **Discussion and Suggestions for Future Research**

Theme 1 suggests that there is still room for further development of formal marketing theory and practice. For example, it is necessary to develop comprehensive conceptual frameworks that provide an overall synopsis of the nature of marketing theory and practice. A conceptual framework will help to bring cohesion by placing each of the different areas in proper perspective. There seems to be similarities between the “management jungle” alluded by Wren and Bedeian (2009) in their discussion of the evolution of management thought and Gummesson's (2002) “marketing smorgasbord”. While the CMP framework represents a synthesis and culmination of different marketing processes and concepts, a book by Kotler (1999) presents a simplified view of the marketing management process—research plus STP plus marketing mix plus implementation and control. However, there still exists a marketing jungle of sorts. These ideas on this theme lead to the proposition of the following question for further research:

#### **Question for future research 1: What is the relationship between the different areas and topics presented under the marketing umbrella?**

Secondly, the second theme noted the dynamic nature of marketing theory and practice. It was observed that the social context of marketing gives it its non-static nature. Arguably, the Russian social context is unique from the rest of the western world, hence its unique brand of marketing practice. Other antecedents of the dynamic nature of marketing besides the socio-economic context that have not been considered in this review should be considered. Such antecedents are relevant because the transient nature of marketing explains in part, the growing gap between marketing theory and practice. If more detail is provided on the nature of the antecedents behind the dynamic nature of marketing theory and practice, then it will be easier to predict and manage the gap. There are also obvious benefits for training and marketing education. The following research question is thus, presented for consideration in further research:

#### **Question for future research 2: Besides the socio-economic context of marketing, what are the other antecedents informing marketing theory and practice?**

Thirdly, theme 3 considered the changing role of marketing in organizations. There is a need for qualitative input on the evolving role of marketing in the organizations. The overlaps and interfaces between marketing and other organizational functions are a good starting point. The relationship between human resources management and marketing is particularly intriguing given the overlaps

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between internal marketing and traditional human resources functions. It is important to clearly outline the cross functional readability of marketing. Again, the benefits of such an outlining to training and education are rather obvious. Hence the following research question is proposed:

**Question for future research 3: What is the specific nature of the proposed inter-functional role of marketing in organizations?**

The fourth theme considered the nonparticipation by most world regions in the development and propagation of marketing thought and practice. Given the suggestions that extending western models is not always appropriate and that, different world regions have their own experiences which inform their theory and practice, it is only necessary that such perspectives be investigated and be brought to light. For example, the specific constituents of contemporary marketing practices and their antecedents as they are practiced in EMCs like the Philippines could be investigated. Indigenous cultural practices should be examined to unravel potential influences that affect business and marketing practices. The following research question is therefore fitting:

**Question for future research 4: What are the specific contributions from different world regions to marketing thought and practice?**

Finally, the way marketing is being taught needs to be investigated in-light of content and pedagogy. Marketing education is one of the potential drivers in the gap between marketing theory and practice. It was highlighted that some content may be redundant. In addition, a prescriptive approach may not be appropriate given the dynamic nature of marketing thought and practice. Besides content, pedagogy should be considered, for example, the viability of living cases as a central pedagogy could be considered. The following research question is therefore requisite:

**Question for future research 5: How is marketing being taught? What is the most appropriate way of teaching marketing?**

Exploring these questions is important at this juncture in the discipline of marketing. Not only will addressing them shed more light on the practice theory gap, but it will also help to refine a maturing discipline. Both quantitative and qualitative options can be used in the exploration.

### **Conclusion**

This paper explored the themes on marketing theory and practice evinced by extant literature over 58 years of research. Because of a systematic review of 87 peer reviewed articles, conceptual and empirical research has been aggregated. By providing a structured overview of marketing theory and practice, the paper contributes to the ongoing debate on marketing theory and practice and provides explanations on the gap between the two. The following specific issues evinced by the review shed light on the gap between marketing theory and practice:

1. The highlighted debates in marketing theory and practice issues in general point to continued debates in the discipline. The continuing debates on marketing research standards are an additional case in point. It may follow then that the disparities between theory and practice are only reflecting such debates.
2. Marketing theory provides a basis for reviewing behavior by marketing practitioners as well as actions by marketing executives. However, such basis is meant to provide guidelines rather than to give prescriptions.
3. Prescriptive approaches to marketing can be traced to positivist philosophical orientations.
4. Contributions to marketing theory are multiple and diverse. On the other hand, marketing practice is evolving. Hence, marketing theory and practice will have to continuously catch up on each other.
5. If marketing is a social science, it may be logical to expect it to be dynamic.
6. The cross functional nature of marketing needs to be investigated further.
7. Marketing education can play a pivotal role in explaining the gap between marketing theory and marketing practice.

As such, this paper provides key insights on where research has been and where additional future research is needed on the important topic of marketing theory and practice. The thematic categories identified in the extant studies shed light on the gap between marketing theory and practice. While the study does not claim to have exhausted all the themes in extant literature, the themes presented characterize a starting point for identifying important knowledge gaps on marketing theory and practice as well as the identification of areas for future academic research. The study offers new perspectives to existing issues which have been discussed in extant literature. From a theoretical perspective, this paper contributes to the literature on marketing theory and practice by outlining extant research and themes. Besides

exploring the proposed areas of future research, further studies may focus on complementing qualitative data with quantitative data for methodological robustness and triangulation.

### **Limitations**

A few limitations of this study can be identified. The systematic review study was constrained to the databases at the researcher's disposal matching the search terms. All other relevant articles in databases that were inaccessible were omitted. Further, only peer reviewed international journals published in English were used. Thus, important publications in other forms like books, conference proceedings, and dissertations were excluded. Citation analysis can generate potent articles. The researchers acknowledge these opportunities and encourage others to take up the challenge.

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