

THE THEORY OF PRINCIPLE-BASED MARKETING: MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPIRICAL VALIDATION

BASIC RESEARCH QUESTION

Prior research of socially-oriented marketing has typically been conducted in a piecemeal fashion, investigating relevant factors in isolation from one another. The result being confusion and ambiguity. My research question therefore centres on the reasons for enduring empirical ambiguities and commercial short-comings with socially-oriented marketing.

KEY PAPER(S)

Porter, M.E. and Kramer, M.R. (2006), Strategy and Society: The Link between Competitive Advantage and Corporate Social Responsibility, *Harvard Business Review*, 84 (12), 78-92.

Du, S., Bhattacharya, C.B. and Sen, S. (2007), Reaping Relational Rewards from Corporate Social Responsibility: The Role of Competitive Positioning, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 24 (3), 224-241.

Mohr, L.A., Webb, D.J. and Harris, K.E. (2001), Do Consumers Expect Companies to be Socially Responsible? The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Buying Behaviour, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 35 (1), 45-72.

MOTIVATION

The motivation underpinning my work is drawn first from my own experience as a marketing practitioner and the perceived deficiencies with the traditional marketing mix to accommodate social forces characterising 21st Century commercial and legislative conditions. Secondly, motivation is drawn from the absence of integrated and holistic research that describes the interrelated nature of salient factors, and the organisational outcomes they predict. Much is written on *what* to do. Little is written on *how* to do it (effectively).

THREE CORE ASPECTS OF ANY EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

THE IDEA

There exists no single theory, nor universally accepted framework, on how to conceptualise and apply socially-oriented marketing activity. Accordingly, the current thesis proposes a suitable theoretical foundation and a process model that represents the theory in applied practise. At the heart of the theory is the concept of 'Principle', that suggests organisations adopt an internally driven 'values-based' perspective, rather than an externally driven 'socially-oriented' perspective, while placing their consumers at the centre of their chain of reasoning, rather than the evolving life-cycle of social issues. The model unifies four established but disparate factors: commitment, communication, and congruence (internal and external) and proposes relationships among them. A fifth mediating factor (cognisance) is also proposed that serves to further explicate the relationships among the primary factors and organisational outcomes.

THE DATA

After extensive pre-testing the final studies utilised a self-report survey drawing participants from a community sample, students at the University of Queensland, and the researcher's peer network. Three experiments were conducted with sample sizes ranging from 239 to 297 participants per experiment. Issues of external validity are noted given the experimental design, and sampling approach. However, as the aim of the thesis is to investigate the relationships among the constructs in the conceptual model, external validity is a secondary concern at this embryonic stage. As the model is now well supported further studies are proposed that subject the model to conditions more representative of commercial contexts, and generalisable to the populations of interest (consumer groups in a variety of socio-cultural contexts).

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THE TOOLS

The experiments measured the contribution made by each construct in the conceptual model on two dependent variables: attitude to the company, and purchase intentions. All measures were sourced from established scales, or those used in prior, peer reviewed studies. Each experiment adopted a 3 (commitment: low/high/control) x 3 (communication: low/high/control) between participants design, under a variety of product categories representative of different degrees of product involvement. A series of regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses under investigation utilising the SPSS PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013).

TWO KEY QUESTIONS

WHAT'S NEW

This is the first model to unite extant factors hypothesised to contribute to the conceptualisation and execution of socially-oriented marketing activity in a cohesive and holistic framework. In doing so it theoretically and empirically explains much ambiguity evident in prior research spanning over 30 years. Presents a new theory and integrates this theory with established marketing practise. In doing so it lays the foundation to further our understanding of a complex, but increasingly important, field of marketing.

SO WHAT

This research provides a novel mechanism that; (1) provides clear direction on how to shape and execute socially-oriented marketing activities, (2) describes expected outcomes from each stage of the model's application, (3) integrates socially oriented marketing activity with traditional marketing practises and, (4) assists with measuring and articulating the return-on-investment derived from socially-oriented marketing activity.

ONE BOTTOM LINE

THE CONTRIBUTION

The conceptual model 'delineates' and 'summarises' (MacInnes 2011, p.144) the prior work so far undertaken in this field. Through delineation I attempt to chart and describe the domain of socially-oriented marketing and how this entity relates to the broader socially constructed world around it. Having achieved this, I then summarise empirical evidence from related, but disparate, instances to generate manageable conclusions under the aegis of unified and robust framework.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The most challenging consideration is that of getting published. I deal with large ideas and it is challenging to present them in isolation. The three main fields of my work may be characterised by; (1) the conceptual development that describes the issues and suggests a solution, (2) the empirical validation of the conceptual work, (3) where, and to what extent, do the proposed theory and model fit into the overall domain of marketing.

Funding for more robust experimentation more generalisable to populations of interest would be beneficial.

I wish to investigate my work under different cultural contexts, requiring collaboration with my counterparts in other countries. There are also important opportunities to investigate more fine-grained considerations within the constructs of the proposed model. Some of these investigations would be best undertaken with methodological approaches with which I am not familiar (e.g. DCM). Accordingly, I seek collaboration with those whose skill sets complement my own in the development of this body of work.