

The Decline of Conceptual Articles and Implications for Knowledge Development

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Abstract

This paper presents a framework for understanding and revitalizing the important role that conceptual articles play in the development of knowledge in the marketing discipline. An analysis of thirty years (1978-2007) of publishing data from major marketing journals indicates that conceptual articles are declining, despite repeated calls for more emphasis on this form of scholarship. The sharpest decline has occurred in the *Journal of Marketing (JM)*, with much of the shift occurring over the past decade. Many substantive areas remain largely unexplored in conceptual articles. Over this thirty-year period, conceptual articles published in *JM* had disproportionately more citations relative to their numbers, attesting to the importance of their role in knowledge development. Addressing the decline of conceptual articles, and restoring their synergistic balance with other forms of scholarship, will require concerted efforts on several interrelated fronts: current generation of scholars; doctoral programs and students; journals, reviewers, and review process; and promotion, tenure, and incentive systems.

Keywords: knowledge development, theory construction, scholarship patterns in a discipline

The Decline of Conceptual Articles and Implications for Knowledge Development

Introduction

Although impactful scholarly work can appear in a variety of different forms, the significance of conceptual articles—contributions that focus primarily on theoretical advances without relying on data—is widely acknowledged in marketing and other social sciences. Since 1974, the *Journal of Marketing*'s Harold A. Maynard Award has recognized 37 influential contributions of which 28 are conceptual. The Sheth Foundation/Journal of Marketing Award recognizes one article each year that has made the most significant long-term contribution to the marketing discipline. From the award's inception in 2001, six of the seven articles to receive this honor have been conceptual. A perusal of the nominated works of recent winners of the Paul D. Converse Award, which recognizes lifetime scholarly achievements in marketing, reveals numerous mentions of conceptual articles. Recent commentaries on the value added by conceptual articles note that this form of scholarship is crucial for maintaining a discipline's long-term vitality (MacInnis 2004; Stewart and Zinkhan 2006; Webster 2005).

Over the years, the *Journal of Marketing* (*JM*) has sought to establish a position of leadership for publishing breakthrough conceptual articles in the marketing discipline (see Kerin [1996] for an editorial and literary history of the journal). When former editor Wind (1979) found *JM* at what he referred to as the “crossroads,” he lamented the lack of theoretical work and called for efforts aimed at strengthening its scholarly credentials. In the ten editorial transitions that have occurred since then, editors have kept on the center stage issues related to theoretical work and how the discipline can facilitate theory building. For instance, almost a decade after Wind, editor Kerin (1988) emphasized the need for “*innovative work on theory* that brings to light new concepts ... if *JM* is to fulfill its editorial promise” (p. 3, emphasis in the original; for a

recent, similar editorial perspective see Rust 2006). Additionally, periodic essays in this journal have noted that the discipline's "major challenges are conceptual" (Webster 2005, p. 6) that must be addressed by placing greater emphasis on "the generation of big ideas" (Staelin 2005a, p. 21; see also Sheth and Sisodia 2005).

Given the often-voiced significance of conceptual articles aimed at theory building, it is noteworthy that there has been no concerted effort to take a comprehensive, long-term look at changing scholarship patterns pertaining to such articles in major marketing journals. Grether (1976), a former editor of *JM*, examined the first forty years (1936-1976) of the journal and found a fairly low proportion of conceptual articles—ranging from 2.7% of all articles (1940-1943) to 14.3% (1956-1959). About twenty years ago, American Marketing Association's (AMA) *Task Force on the Development of Marketing Thought* examined a broad range of issues impacting the marketing discipline, including the issue of theory and theory-building articles. The task force's report (Monroe et al. 1988) had a much broader agenda and did not present any detailed data regarding changing scholarship patterns in marketing. However, it did express a concern about the "lack of published journal articles that review past research and integrate that research to provide new conceptualizations of marketing issues" (p. 19). More recently, MacInnis (2004) reiterated such concerns and called for a closer examination of these trends.

How have long-term scholarship patterns related to conceptual articles really changed in major marketing journals, following the appearance of the AMA task force's report twenty years ago? To what extent has the discipline been responsive to oft-repeated calls for more conceptual articles? Has there been a shift in the substantive focus of conceptual articles over the years? What is the impact of conceptual articles as indicated by citation data and what are the

characteristics of the most-highly cited conceptual articles? What implications do answers to these questions have for knowledge development in our field?

In this paper, I explore these and related questions that are vital in many ways to our discipline as it continues to mature and move forward. Towards that end, this paper presents a framework for understanding the significant, multi-faceted roles of conceptual articles in knowledge development in the marketing discipline. Detailed longitudinal data on scholarship patterns over thirty years (1978-2007) from four journals that are widely recognized as major publication outlets in marketing are examined: *Journal of Marketing (JM)*, *Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)*, *Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)*, and *Marketing Science (MKS)*. To explore changes occurring beyond this set of journals, publishing trends in an additional highly-ranked, broad-based marketing journal, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (JAMS)*, are also discussed. In particular, this paper examines changes over the years in the number of conceptual articles. A conceptual article is defined as *one that focuses primarily on theory development and does not present data and/or analyses for purposes of theory testing* (additional definitional and coding details are discussed later). A finer-grained analysis of the 234 conceptual articles published in *JM* during this period is also presented, including the theory-building strategies shared by a select group of highly-cited conceptual articles.

The paper is organized as follows. To frame the discussion of specific issues that are unique to conceptual articles, I begin by contrasting the contexts of *discovery* and *justification*, followed by a discussion of the significant role of conceptual articles in knowledge development. Publication-related data from major marketing journals from 1978-2007 are then presented, with a particular emphasis on conceptual articles published in *JM*. The article concludes with a commentary on the implications of the findings for knowledge development in marketing.

The Contexts of Discovery and Justification

The Context Distinction

To understand scholarship patterns in marketing, it is useful to briefly discuss the distinction between the *context of discovery* and the *context of justification* (for an overview of recent perspectives on this distinction, see Shickore and Steinle 2006). The context of discovery generally relates to the conception of new ideas (e.g., new constructs) or to the creative synthesis of existing ideas (e.g., new relationships between well-accepted constructs). The context of justification is the realm where data and analytical procedures are employed to establish the plausibility and acceptability of these ideas (Hunt 1991). Both contexts, together, advance theory development. As discussed later, it is important to note that the role of conceptual articles is not limited only to the context of discovery. For instance, in the context of justification, conceptual articles perform an invaluable function by critiquing and integrating extant theoretical perspectives.

The distinction between these two contexts can be traced to Reichenbach's (1938) influential—and controversial—book *Experience and Prediction* in which he made a sharp demarcation between discovery and justification processes involved in knowledge development. It was not the distinction *per se* that was controversial, but Reichenbach's assertion that epistemology must concern itself only with “constructing the context of justification” (p. 7). That is, while the logic of justification-related processes could be systematically analyzed and critiqued, the logic of discovery was not amenable to such scrutiny.

Reichenbach's (1938) distinction between the contexts of discovery and justification, and, more importantly, the implications of that distinction, had a profound impact on how philosophers of science thought about what should and should not be on their agenda (see, e.g.,

Popper 1959; Siegel 1980). For decades, issues related to discovery processes remained largely off-limits—the proverbial “black box” that could not be opened. It was not until the publication of Hanson’s (1958) ground-breaking *Patterns of Discovery* that issues related to the initial stages of conceiving or inventing a theory were subjected to careful analysis. In sharp contrast with the prevailing views at that time, Hanson argued that there is considerable value in exploring the *logic of discovery* and that such exploration is indeed feasible. Hanson’s historical analyses reflected his deep interest in understanding how theories are conceived and developed, and how extant theories create path dependencies in the pursuit of knowledge in a scientific community. It was largely due to Hanson’s work that the study of discovery processes in scientific endeavors acquired some measure of legitimacy. Nevertheless, the legacy of Reichenbach’s (1938) admonishment to steer away from examining issues pertaining to discovery continues to weigh heavily on a broad spectrum of disciplines in both the natural and social sciences.

Implications of the Context Distinction

One important implication of the discovery-justification distinction is that while an extensive range of methods and approaches has been developed for evaluating the justification phase of knowledge development, much less is known about how the output of the discovery phase should be evaluated. Furthermore, as Kordig (1978) has observed, it is difficult to demarcate explicitly where discovery completely ends and justification begins. As discovery-related activities can and do occur during the justification phase, evaluation-related challenges are more pervasive than what one expects. They are not limited only to the discovery phase.

Effectively managing the fine line between discovery- and justification-related considerations takes considerable effort and skill on the part of authors, reviewers, and editors who must collaboratively arrive at a mutually-acceptable set of knowledge claims. Recent

writings on this topic suggest that these difficulties are not limited to, but are particularly accentuated, in the case of conceptual articles (e.g., Hambrick 2007; Stewart and Zinkhan 2006; Sutton and Staw 1995; Weick 1995). For the evaluation of such contributions, less-structured heuristic appraisal criteria play a more important role and reaching closure through a process of negotiation between authors, reviewers and editors can be very challenging. Stewart and Zinkhan (2006), reflecting on their experience as journal editors in marketing, observed that “it is more difficult to get conceptual articles through the review process” (p. 477). Speaking from the perspective of research in management, Sutton and Staw (1995) discussed the well-intentioned, but in the end counterproductive, demands during the review process that make it almost impossible for many breakthrough conceptual ideas to emerge simply because appropriate data are unavailable:

“The problem with theory building may also be structural. Journals could be placing authors in a double bind ... Contradictory demands for both strong theory and precise measurement are often satisfied only by hypocritical writing. Theory is crafted around the data ... The result of these omissions is that the craft of manuscript writing becomes the art of fitting concepts and arguments around what has been measured and discovered” (p. 381).

These sentiments are echoed by Markus and Saunders (2007) who have described impediments to theory development in the information sciences area, noting that the contribution of theory-building articles is often regarded as unacceptable if supporting empirical evidence is also not provided in the same article. The frequency and similar nature of such concerns across disciplines points to their systemic nature, most likely stemming from the same source: evaluation-related challenges created by the often-conflicting demands of the discovery and justification phases of knowledge development.

As noted above, conceptual articles have an important role to play in both the discovery and justification phases of knowledge development. To discuss this role in greater detail, the next section presents a framework for (1) understanding the synergistic links between conceptual articles and other forms of scholarship (Figure 1); and (2) delineating specific theory-building strategies of influential conceptual articles in marketing (Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 and Figure 1 about Here]

The Significant Role of Conceptual Articles in Knowledge Development and Insights From Selected Influential Contributions

Conceptual Articles

Following MacInnis (2004), the broad spectrum of research endeavors that appear in the marketing literature can be categorized into four groups on the basis of two underlying characteristics: conceptual content (present or absent) and empirical content (present or absent). Predominantly *descriptive articles* that have no conceptual or empirical content are generally inappropriate for academic journals and thus merit no further discussion. *Data-driven articles* are characterized by empirical analyses that are done in the absence of any compelling conceptual content. *Empirical articles*, representing the vast majority of published articles, contain both conceptual and empirical content. The relative emphasis on conceptual versus empirical content can vary across such articles (e.g., hypotheses-driven, interpretive, and meta-analytic empirical approaches). Finally, in the four-part categorization of articles suggested by MacInnis (2004), *conceptual articles* focus primarily on theoretical development and do not present data and/or analysis for purposes of theory testing. There can be considerable variation in the scope, content, and structure of such articles. Conceptual articles may present theoretical syntheses (e.g., theoretical reviews, integrative frameworks), develop completely new ideas (e.g., novel theories, propositional inventories, analytical models of unexplored phenomena), or direct attention at

substantive domains that have not received adequate attention. This paper recognizes and discusses these multi-faceted roles of conceptual articles, although the primary focus remains on issues related to theory development.

Significance of Conceptual Articles' Multi-faceted Roles

To facilitate discussion of the multiple roles played by conceptual articles, and their significance, it is useful to briefly revisit McGrath and Brinberg's (1983) analysis of how knowledge develops through an inter-play of the *substantive*, *conceptual*, and *methodological* domains of a discipline. Placing the individual researcher at the center of their analysis, McGrath and Brinberg noted that a new research project may be motivated by a specific substantive issue, a conceptual interest, and/or a desire to explore a methodology. Overtime, through a confluence of these three domains over numerous projects and researchers, advances occur in the knowledge base of a discipline. Of course, depending upon researchers' paradigmatic leanings, there can be considerable diversity in terms of ontological (nature of reality), axiological (overriding goals), and epistemological (nature of knowledge generated) assumptions as a discipline moves forward (see, e.g., Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Effectively harnessing this plurality of views and approaches is challenging, but it also enriches the disciplinary discourse and provides opportunities for new knowledge development through metatriangulation (Lewis and Grimes 1999).

Against this broad backdrop, Figure 1 depicts the incremental evolution of knowledge in a discipline. The framework, adapted from Darden (1991), builds on the perspective that knowledge development is, generally, a gradual process in which key building blocks are added over a long period of time. For purposes of exposition, this time period may be viewed along the contexts of discovery and justification that were discussed earlier. Conceptual articles have a key

role to play along this entire continuum. Their role in the first context (i.e., idea generation in the discovery phase that could initiate theory development) often receives most of the attention in discussions of such contributions to the literature. A key strength of conceptual articles in this context is that their creative scope can remain relatively unfettered by data-related limitations (e.g., in the case of emerging phenomena where little or no data may be available). However, just as important in the knowledge development process is the less-recognized role of conceptual articles in the justification phase. Conceptual contributions in this phase take stock of emerging empirical evidence, concepts, and explanations—including the underlying ontological, axiological, and epistemological assumptions. Theoretical understanding of a focal phenomenon evolves from the collective, synergistic research efforts that occur in the discovery and justification phases.¹

Additional details about the two important roles shown on the right side of Figure 1 are discussed in the next section (for an overview, see Table 1). A key point here is the inter-relatedness of these two roles, not just among themselves in the context of conceptual articles, but also with other empirically-based contributions that may emerge over time in a given substantive area. Conceptual works are synergistically intertwined with other conceptual *and* empirical contributions. Like species in a complex eco-system of knowledge development, they not only compete with each other for attention in a community of researchers but also exhibit multiple interdependencies. When one key element in the mix of contributions is removed or altered significantly, knowledge development processes are likely to be impacted—often in unanticipated ways. Each discipline must, collectively, negotiate a balance between conceptual

¹ Readers interested in a formal discussion of what constitutes a “theory” are referred to several excellent sources in the literature (see, e.g., Hunt 1991; Zaltman, LeMasters, and Heffring 1982; Sutton and Staw 1995). Some key characteristics generally highlighted in these discussions are: a structured set of statements representing a focal phenomenon’s explanation; empirical verifiability; and some law-like generalizations.

and empirical contributions to maintain a vibrant environment for knowledge development. While it is unclear where this balance lies for marketing as it evolves, changing scholarship patterns reported later suggest that this issue merits active debate and discussion.

Insights from Influential Conceptual Articles

As noted above, conceptual articles have an important role to play along the entire discovery-justification continuum of the knowledge development process (see Figure 1). To show the applicability of the framework depicted in Figure 1 to the marketing discipline, and to develop initial insights about how impactful conceptual articles are crafted, this section explores characteristics shared by a select group of highly-cited conceptual articles in *JM*. Specifically, one conceptual article with the most citations for each year from 1978-2007 was selected to get a broad spectrum of articles across the years.² A few additional noteworthy conceptual articles (e.g., award winners) are also included in the discussion since they provide useful insights regarding the crafting of conceptual contributions. In the discussion below, although only a limited number of articles that are most useful for purposes of exposition are referenced in the text, by no means is it implied that articles not referenced in the text are less impactful.

To organize the discussion about how leading conceptual articles in marketing have crafted theory, I build on Darden's (1991) work on what she refers to as *strategies* for theory development (see also Zaltman, LeMasters, and Heffring 1982). According to Darden, a variety of different approaches are reflected in how theory development activities are performed in a given discipline. These approaches can be grouped into several meaningful categories, each category comprised of a fairly homogeneous set of strategies that facilitate theory development.

² Given *JM*'s traditional strengths in publishing conceptual articles, an in-depth focus on the most prominent articles in this journal was considered appropriate for this exploratory analysis. The articles were selected based on citation data from Social Sciences Citation Index, collected during July 2008. Although the discussion presented here focuses primarily on crafting conceptual articles, key ideas also apply more broadly to other types of theory-building work (e.g., constructing theory for empirical investigations).

As shown in Table 1, these strategies can be grouped in two broad, higher-level categories: (1) strategies aimed at initiating theory development; and (2) strategies aimed at theory assessment and enhancement. This section describes these strategies in more detail, along with specific exemplars of some of the most-highly cited conceptual articles in marketing.³

Strategies for initiating theory development. These strategies can be organized into four categories: (1) analogy; (2) invoke a theory type; (3) interrelations; and (4) move to another level of analysis.

The use of *analogy* can be a very effective strategy for initiating theory development in a new or emerging substantive domain by comparing some elements of that domain with an existing, familiar domain. In essence, by juxtaposing the familiar and unfamiliar domains, this strategy seeks to generate new ideas that can spur theory development. Hoffman and Novak (1996) initiated theory development in the emerging area of electronic environments by seeing a connection between online navigation and the completion of tasks in other realms that facilitated or impeded the psychological state of “flow” (resulting from the match/mismatch of an individual’s skills and task difficulty). Day (1994) argued that the field of TQM (total quality management) could provide valuable insights to spur theory development focusing on the implementational aspects of market orientation that had not received adequate research attention.

Invoke a theory type is a strategy that leverages a well-established theory to initiate new theory development in an under-researched focal phenomenon. When using this strategy, researchers must decide which elements of the extant theory they wish to emphasize or

³ These strategies are not meant to represent an exhaustive set of possibilities and individual researchers in a discipline are likely to discover other innovative approaches for crafting theoretical advances in conceptual articles. Darden’s (1991) account, based on theory development strategies in natural sciences, includes some additional approaches that are not discussed in detail here to keep the discussion focused on strategies that are likely to be more applicable in social sciences (particularly marketing). In some cases, to conserve space, I have combined different strategies that share some similarities. The strategies included in this section have distinctive elements, but some overlapping is expected as they all focus on enhancing creativity in the theory construction process.

deemphasize in an effort to make it appropriate for understanding the focal phenomenon. That is, there is a need for flexibility and creative adaptation. For example, in the area of distribution channels, a considerable amount of theoretical and empirical work can be traced to Stern and Reve's (1980) seminal framework. This framework builds on the political economy theoretical paradigm focusing on economic and sociopolitical forces. In a similar vein, but in a very different substantive context, Deshpandé and Webster (1989) leveraged extant theories of organizational culture to propose an expanded research agenda for marketing that directed more attention at organizational issues.

A move to another level of analysis allows the researcher to look at a focal phenomenon from a different vantage point. When using this strategy for theory development, the researcher imagines alternative units of analyses for studying the phenomenon and delineates the implications for theory development. Based on this analysis, the researcher may purposefully adopt a previously overlooked, but still relevant, unit of analysis to spur new theory development. Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987) noted that research in marketing had traditionally viewed exchange processes as *transactional*, a perspective that largely ignored the *relational* perspective. By switching from a transactional to a relational perspective, these authors developed an expanded theoretical framework for studying buyer-seller relationships. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) observed that the study of perceived quality in marketing has largely adopted a tangible goods perspective that could be quite different from an intangible services perspective. By switching from tangible to intangible, these authors developed their "gaps model" of service quality that led to theoretical and empirical advances in this area.

The strategy of *interrelations* spurs theory development by creatively integrating bodies of knowledge from one or more substantive areas to generate new insights and research opportunities. As such, this strategy must effectively meet the challenging, dual objectives of theoretical integration and renewal. When successful, this strategy can lead to important breakthroughs and create a new research stream. Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey (1998) developed a framework for studying market-based assets by integrating selected concepts from the fields of finance (e.g., cash flows, volatility, book and replacement value of assets) and marketing (e.g., customer relationships, channel relationships, and partner relationships). Kohli and Jaworski (1990) took an integrative look at over thirty years of different perspectives on the marketing concept. They concluded that there was a need to clarify the conceptual domain of this frequently-used, but still ambiguous, terminology. In an effort to achieve theoretical integration and renewal, these authors focused on the hitherto overlooked implementational aspects of the marketing concept and proposed a research agenda to facilitate further theoretical and empirical work focusing on the market orientation construct.

Strategies for theory assessment and enhancement. Theory assessment and enhancement is involved in most scholarly endeavors—including the strategies for theory development discussed above. In the case of some influential conceptual articles, the primary intended contribution is to provide an assessment of a focal theory and identify specific avenues for further theoretical enhancements. As discussed in this section, one or more of the following three strategies are generally reflected in such articles: (1) review and critique a focal theory; (2) enhance theory to address mixed/ambiguous evidence; and (3) identify and address gaps in extant conceptualizations.

Some highly-cited conceptual articles *review and critique a focal theory* to make an important contribution to the literature. Generally, such articles select theories that have reached a level of maturation and are poised for the next stage of their development. Gaski's (1984) critical review of the theory of power and conflict in marketing channels illustrates this strategy. Based on this review, Gaski noted that the theory over emphasized a *perception-based* view of power that one channel member has over another member (i.e., power is largely in the eyes of an affected party in a dyad of channel members). Rindfleisch and Heide (1997) directed their attention at the extensive literature in marketing focusing on applications of transaction cost analysis. Taking a collective look at this theory's contributions in marketing, they assessed the conceptual clarity of transaction costs, critically evaluated the theory's behavioral assumptions, and questioned the overreliance on single (as opposed to relational) transactions as the unit of analysis.

Conceptual articles that *develop theory to address mixed/ambiguous evidence* are influential because they take account of anomalies or mixed evidence and advance ideas that can enhance (or, perhaps, even replace) an extant theory or theoretical perspective. The contribution of such articles often stems from their ability to see patterns in seemingly unconnected pieces of mixed evidence that can provide opportunities for theoretical advancement. Kerin, Varadarajan, and Peterson's (1992) framework was motivated by ambiguities and mixed evidence in the mature literature on first-mover advantage. They contended that the prevailing theoretical view that order-of-entry has a direct effect on market share should be qualified in the context of a wide range of environmental and organizational contingencies (e.g., buying practices in an industry, switching costs). Hunt and Morgan (1995) presented a critique of the well-entrenched neoclassical theory of perfect competition. They raised questions regarding the validity of this

theory's assumption base that they felt accounted for its mixed track record in the strategy literature. They also outlined their comparative advantage theory, specifying differences from the neoclassical theory along several dimensions that have important implications for marketing-related applications.

The third broad strategy used by conceptual articles aimed at theory assessment and enhancement is to *identify and address gaps in extant conceptualizations*. These gaps can take a variety of forms such as missing antecedents, mediating processes, moderating constructs, or incomplete specification of outcomes (Whetten 1989). In the marketing channels literature, Frazier (1983) noted that effective management of channels necessitates an understanding of three distinct, but related, stages (i.e., initiation, implementation, and review of relationships). He also noted that extant conceptualizations had focused almost exclusively on the second stage (implementation), largely ignoring issues related to the stages of initiation and review. Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan (1986) found a critical missing link in conceptualizations focusing on performance outcomes in personal selling contexts: the ability of sales people. They noted that although other important constructs (e.g., role perceptions and motivation) had received attention in the literature, the absence of a salesperson's ability in extant conceptualizations represented an important omission. To address this missing link, these authors advanced and developed the concept of adaptive selling.

In summary, this section highlights the significance of conceptual articles' multi-faceted roles in knowledge development along the entire continuum from the context of discovery to the context of justification. Encouraging and nurturing such theoretical works is crucial for continual intellectual renewal in a discipline. The next section explores the extent to which the marketing discipline has been successful in creating such an environment for conceptual articles.

Conceptual Articles in Major Marketing Journals: 1978-2007

Data

This section focuses on conceptual articles published in the following four major journals in marketing: *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, and *Marketing Science*. These journals are widely recognized as the most reputable and influential publication outlets in marketing (Baumgartner and Pieters 2003; Hult, Neese, and Bashaw 1997; Hult, Reimann, and Schilke 2009). To obtain some initial insights related to publishing trends beyond this set of journals, an additional highly-ranked, broad-based marketing journal (*Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*) is also included for comparative purposes. Data are from 1978 to 2007 (except for *MKS* which published its first issue in 1982). The decision to use 1978 as a cut-off year allows the examination of publishing trends over thirty years, a reasonably long but recent time frame given the age and evolution of these journals.⁴ Following the procedure described in the Appendix (panel A), 818 conceptual articles were identified from a total of 5520 articles.

[Insert Table 2 about Here]

Overall Trends

Table 2 presents the overall trends from 1978-2007 for *JM*, *JMR*, *JCR*, *MKS*, and *JAMS*. The data for *JM*, the discipline's traditional home for conceptual articles, are particularly revealing and indicative of potentially significant changes at the journal. *JM* published a total of 1048 articles of which 234 are conceptual (22.33%). The 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s were characterized by a fairly uniform percentage of conceptual articles (26.13% for 1978-1982, 30.48% for 1983-1987, and 34.56% for 1988-1992). It appears that *JM*'s reputation for

⁴ The inaugural issues of the journals appeared in the following years: *JM* (1936), *JMR* (1964), *JCR* (1974), *MKS* (1982), and *JAMS* (1973).

publishing conceptual work was established and strengthened during these years. This trend peaked in 1988 (at 50%). Starting with 1993, the first signs of a declining emphasis on conceptual articles begin to appear. During 1993-1997, 22.45% of all published articles were conceptual. By 1998-2002, this number had declined to 17.01%. For the most recent five-year period (2003-2007), conceptual articles accounted for 6.13% of all published articles. Since 2000, it is not uncommon for the annual percentage of conceptual articles to be in low single digits—something that never occurred during the first twenty years after 1978. The relationship between publication patterns and time periods is significant (see Table 2).⁵

As journals vary in terms of positioning, there are differences in trends across the remaining four journals. *JMR*, given its traditional focus on research methodology and empirically-driven research, has published relatively few conceptual articles (2.34%). The pattern for *JCR* has fluctuated, but the level of conceptual articles has remained quite low over the years (7.47%). *MKS*, positioned as a quantitatively oriented journal from its inception, has maintained a surprisingly high level of conceptual articles in its publication mix (29.22%). These articles generally tend to be analytical investigations aimed primarily at theory development as opposed to theory testing. At *JAMS*, during the most recent five-year period, there was a sharp decline (to 11.48%) from previous levels. In the case of all four journals, the relationship between publication patterns and time periods is significant (see Table 2).

Taking a comparative look at all journals, it appears that the most substantial shift in publishing profile has occurred at *JM*—especially during the past ten years. The percentage of

⁵ Five-year time periods facilitate visual depiction and interpretation of the data. The relationship between publishing patterns and time periods is tested using a 6 (1978-1982, 1983-1987, 1988-1992, 1993-1997, 1998-2002, 2003-2007) by 2 (conceptual articles, other articles) contingency table. As the inaugural issue of *MKS* appeared in 1982, this contingency table is modified as follows to retain consistency with other journals and data presented in Table 2: 5 (1983-1987, 1988-1992, 1993-1997, 1998-2002, 2003-2007) by 2 (conceptual articles, other articles) Including 1982 does not change the pattern of results.

conceptual articles continues to decline sharply at this journal. This declining trend is especially noteworthy given *JM*'s long legacy of being the leading outlet for conceptual articles. The next section presents a finer-grained examination of all conceptual articles published in *JM* during the thirty-year study period.

Substantive Focus and Impact of Conceptual Articles in JM

Given *JM*'s traditionally important position in the marketing discipline as a publisher of conceptual articles, a closer look at conceptual articles appearing in this journal is warranted. This section presents two analyses for this purpose, using all conceptual articles (n = 234) in *JM* from 1978-2007. The first analysis presents a broad categorization of conceptual articles based on their substantive focus. The second analysis examines the impact of conceptual articles using citation data.

[Insert Table 3 about Here]

Substantive focus of conceptual articles. The categorization of articles was aimed at identifying the substantive focus of conceptual articles and how that focus has shifted over the years. As shown in Table 3, there are 23 categories that are organized under five broad substantive areas (The Marketing Environment, Marketing Functions, Special Marketing Applications, Marketing Research, and Other Topics). *JM* has a long history of using this categorization approach for organizing its Marketing Literature section (this section was discontinued in 2004 with the increasing availability of electronic bibliographic databases).⁶

Coding details are described in the Appendix (panel B).

⁶ As with any broad classification system, there are potential limitations such as the coarseness and placement of individual categories. *JM* also publishes a Subject and Author Index, but it uses categories that change periodically. Therefore, this index could not be used consistently over the years for coding purposes. Overall, *JM*'s Marketing Literature categorization approach was considered more appropriate for the analysis presented in this section. For presentational clarity, the data are presented across ten-year time periods.

Overall, from 1978-2007 (see last column in Table 3), conceptual articles in marketing have focused on a relatively small number of substantive areas: management, planning, and strategy (24.79%); theory and philosophy of science (17.52%); consumer behavior (8.97%); and legal, political, and economic issues (8.12%). These four substantive areas alone account for almost 60% of all conceptual articles; many areas received minimal attention. Looking across the three ten-year time periods, the analysis of a contingency table indicates that the relative emphasis on the four broad substantive areas A-D shown in the table has shifted ($\chi^2(6) = 19.44$, $p < .01$). In terms of specific substantive areas, the steepest decline has occurred in two areas: theory and philosophy of science; and legal, political, and economic issues. In the most recent ten-year time period, there has been a resurgence of interest in two areas: consumer behavior and industrial (business-to-business) marketing. While some year-to-year shifts are to be expected, what is striking is the large number of substantive areas that have received relatively little scrutiny in conceptual articles.

[Insert Table 4 about Here]

Impact of conceptual articles. Although there are multiple indicators of an article's impact, citation data are increasingly employed as a useful metric for such assessments in the growing field of scientometrics (e.g., Stremersch, Verniers, and Verhoef 2007). In light of this paper's broader agenda, the analysis presented in this section is not intended to be a detailed scientometric investigation of conceptual articles that have appeared in *JM*. Rather, the objective is to explore the following specific questions: Do conceptual articles account for disproportionately more, or less, citations relative to their numbers? While conceptual articles feature disproportionately in awards (as noted earlier), what is the relative impact of a broader mix of all conceptual articles from a citation perspective? Additional investigations of conceptual

articles' influence on knowledge development in marketing can build on the findings reported below.

The results are presented in Table 4. Overall, for the 1978-2007 time period, conceptual articles accounted for disproportionately more citations in 23 out of 30 years (see positive entries in the last column). Of the seven years in which the proportionate contribution to citations is less, three are in the most recent time period (2005-2007) where data are likely to be less reliable for such assessments (due to recency of the citation data). The proxy for conceptual articles' relative impact (last column, A-B) ranges from a low of -9.07 to a high of 34.78 (mean = 5.93, sd = 9.48; $t = 3.43$, $p < .01$, two-sided), with the following overall distribution: negative values (7 years), 0-5 (12 years), 5-10 (4 years), and greater than 10 (7 years). A nonparametric signed rank test is also significant ($S = 157.5$, $p < .001$). These analyses, while limited to just *JM*, provide some initial evidence about the perceived value of conceptual articles to the community of researchers. Conceptual articles, relative to their numbers, account for disproportionately more citations.

The discussion thus far raises some important questions that merit attention: Why have conceptual articles declined despite their widely-acknowledged significance? What steps are needed to address this trend that has significant long-term implications for the marketing discipline? As one begins to explore these questions, it is important to note that journals reflect the collective contributions of an intellectual community (Stewart 1999) and it is this community that ultimately determines what is valued and produced. Therefore, clues to understanding shifting scholarship patterns lie in carefully analyzing disciplinary forces or drivers impacting the academic community in marketing (MacInnis 2004). The next section focuses on understanding and addressing these forces.

Understanding and Addressing the Decline of Conceptual Articles in Marketing

The knowledge output of a discipline results from a complex interplay of many individual, group, and institutional factors (Kuhn 1962). Table 5 identifies several disciplinary entities that are likely to play a role in determining the *type* of research (i.e., conceptual versus empirical) produced in the marketing discipline. Some of these entities (current generation of scholars and doctoral students) represent individual and group factors, while others reflect the institutional infrastructure of the discipline (doctoral programs; journals, reviewers, and review process; promotion, tenure, and incentive systems). Below, I discuss the role played by these disciplinary entities and make recommendations to spur the development and publication of conceptual articles in the marketing discipline.

[Insert Table 5 about Here]

Current Generation of Scholars

One potential driver of shifting scholarship patterns in the current generation of scholars could be the increasing availability of data and sophisticated analytical tools (MacInnis 2004). A discipline is often defined by its tools (Deighton 1997) and marketing's enthusiastic embrace of computing technology, coupled with the increasing availability of extensive data, has left an indelible mark on the discipline. As marketing has continued to become more "computationally focused" (Rust 2006), scholars have acquired new methodological skills and the sophistication of empirical investigations has increased. Unfortunately, one consequence of this methodological focus is that, over time, the discipline has become fragmented (see MacInnis 2005) and scholars' ability and interest to embark upon integrative conceptual investigations have diminished.

Recommendations. Action is needed from scholars at all career stages, but the current situation is unlikely to change unless the senior leadership of the discipline becomes involved

and recognizes the serious, long-term consequences of declining conceptual articles. Senior scholars occupy a privileged position by virtue of their prior accomplishments, deep institutional knowledge, and less susceptibility to career- and publication-related pressures (Webster 2005). That is, they have the time, knowledge, and power that can be leveraged effectively to initiate change. Through these efforts, deliberations related to the need for conceptual contributions can be initiated at department, college, and discipline levels (e.g., journals and professional associations). Change is likely to come slowly, but once these efforts get some visibility in the field, more scholars will begin to reflect on, and reinvest in, the discipline's conceptual domain.

Doctoral Programs and Students

Doctoral programs are shaped by current scholars and, as the current scholars' research programs have changed, so have the doctoral programs. In particular, readily available data and analytical tools have created a dramatic shift in the content and structure of doctoral programs. Doctoral seminars focusing on substantive and conceptual issues appear to have been a casualty of this shift.⁷ It is not uncommon for doctoral programs to offer an extensive array of methodology courses outside marketing but relatively little depth on topics of substantive and conceptual importance to marketing (e.g., marketing and economic history). The decline of conceptual articles most likely originates from these fundamental shifts "upstream" in our doctoral programs.

Recommendations. A comprehensive evaluation of the content and structure of doctoral programs in marketing should be a top priority for AMA's Academic Council, perhaps in collaboration with AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) to provide some degree of oversight and enforceability. One of the primary goals of these efforts should be

⁷ In an informal review of doctoral programs' curriculum, I found only a few programs (less than one-third) that offered seminars dedicated exclusively to theory development. While it is true that doctoral students can learn about theory development in other courses, the shifting priorities in doctoral programs are evident.

to restore pedagogical balance between the substantive, conceptual, and methodological domains of the discipline. Doctoral seminars in theory construction, which have disappeared from many leading programs in recent years, should be resurrected. Substantive and conceptual course content in marketing and related disciplines should also be enhanced. New dissertation formats are needed that encourage and facilitate deeper theorizing. The increasingly popular multi-essay format has certain efficiencies and signaling benefits (e.g., allowing publications to emerge prior to the completion of doctoral studies), but by placing a premium on the collection of multiple datasets in a relatively short time period, this approach can sometimes prematurely deflect attention from deep theory development to issues of data feasibility. Finally, as our discipline does attract professionals with doctoral training in other fields, AMA should take the lead in developing post-graduation curriculum guidelines pertaining to substantive and conceptual course content in marketing.

Journals, Reviewers, and Review Process

Over time, published work shapes review boards and the clarity of review processes in the substantive, conceptual, and methodological domains. McAllister (2005) has observed that “our field is using review standards that favor execution over ideas” (p. 17). MacInnis (2005) has expressed concern about the possibility of an “empirical bias” in the review process. The decline of conceptual articles thus appears tied, at least partly, to such reviewing-related changes in our journals. Journals, in turn, signal to potential authors the type of knowledge that the discipline values and reinforce established scholarship patterns.

Recommendations. First and foremost is the very practical, but critical, matter relating to journal positioning and space. Simply put, if a discipline is committed to theory-building scholarship manifested in conceptual articles, it must demonstrate that commitment with

unmistakable clarity in its major journals. It is noteworthy that flagship journals in a number of other business disciplines already have, or are currently in the midst of, doing just that.⁸ Looking ahead, there are several potential initiatives worthy of consideration.

First, given *JM*'s legacy of publishing conceptual articles, a special section dedicated to such articles can be created in the journal. Other journals, depending on their positioning, can also consider this approach. Second, over the long term, there is a need to consider the feasibility of developing a new *flagship* journal dedicated to conceptual articles. The success of this journal will require concerted, discipline-wide efforts over a long period of time. Towards that end, high-visibility *Theory Pre-conferences* and/or special sessions focused exclusively on theory development and assessment in different substantive areas should be institutionalized as permanent features of national conferences. Finally, cutting across these specific initiatives, is the need for developing a better understanding of how conceptual articles should be evaluated. Relative to empirical articles, the criteria for evaluating conceptual articles are less developed in marketing due to the lack of a specialized flagship journal for such works. Such criteria generally evolve in a discipline over a long period of time, shaped by shared practices (the archives of all submitted articles at a leading journal such as *JM* may provide valuable insights in this regard).

[Insert Table 6 about Here]

⁸ The field of management took this step in 1976 when it launched *Academy of Management Review* focused exclusively on conceptual articles. This journal, it is worth noting, has for many years been the most highly-cited journal among scholarly publications in business. *MIS Quarterly*, one of the leading journals in information science, created an expanded special section (Review and Theory) in 2007 dedicated to conceptual articles (Markus and Saunders 2007). In 2008, the American Accounting Association's Executive Committee began discussing the need for creating a new flagship journal focusing exclusively on conceptual articles. Even in the computationally-intensive discipline of finance, all major journals have cultivated a culture of publishing conceptual articles. Perhaps in response to these developments, new marketing journals focused on conceptual articles have emerged or have been proposed in recent years (e.g., Review of Marketing Research, AMS Review). The discipline-wide impact of these journals remains to be seen.

Table 6 presents several guidelines in an effort to initiate the development of shared practices for evaluating conceptual articles in our field. The guidelines reflect the perspective that, within the set of general evaluation criteria that can apply to a wide range of scholarly endeavors (conceptual and empirical), there are specific evaluative considerations that merit special attention in the context of conceptual articles (see, e.g., Darden 1991; Hunt 1991; Newton-Smith 1981; Ozanne, Fern, and Yadav 1990; Whetten 1989; Zaltman, LeMasters, and Heffring 1982). While the first two general criteria (exposition and theory building approach) can usually be applied in a straightforward manner, the evaluation of conceptual articles can present substantial challenges with respect to the remaining three criteria (innovativeness, potential impact, and validity). Judgments regarding innovativeness and potential impact focus on “the promise, the future potential (including what is at stake), the problem-solving capacity, or what we might call the ‘opportunity profile’ of a claim” (Nickles 2006, p. 161). Such forward-looking considerations are extremely important for evaluating conceptual articles but are difficult to use and/or articulate during the evaluation process. In particular, in the absence of data, the validity of claims made in conceptual articles must rely on evaluative considerations such as explanatory adequacy and conceptual robustness (see, e.g., Skipper and Hyman 1987). Calls for data are warranted only after all conceptual avenues have been fully explored. An inflexible evaluative stance that simultaneously demands theory development and theory testing in *every* paper is likely to impede knowledge development (Hambrick 2007; Sutton and Staw 1995).

Promotion, Tenure, and Incentive Systems

In marketing, the characteristics of the prevailing P&T system have been criticized for instilling in young scholars a short-term orientation (Staelin 2005b; Wilkie 2005). As a result, efficiency (or even expediency) is sometimes viewed as a necessity to be successful; many

young scholars hesitate to embark upon risky, theory-development conceptual articles that tend to have a longer development cycle. This hesitation is most likely further reinforced by two important considerations: (1) long-term trends reported earlier showing that fewer conceptual articles are being published; and (2) the absence of a flagship journal dedicated exclusively to conceptual articles.

Recommendations. First, efforts are needed to elevate the significance of theoretical contributions in the P&T process. This can be initiated at departmental levels, followed by efforts at the college and university levels. As the proposed changes necessitate a shift in culture and values, the difficulties in making these changes must not be underestimated. Second, Staelin (2005b) has suggested that creating a properly functioning post-doctoral infrastructure will provide some relief from the time pressure associated with the current P&T system. Wilkie's (2005) proposal is to increase the duration of the P&T clock to 9-10 years. Third, for post-tenure evaluations, significantly more emphasis must be placed on theoretical contributions to the field. From this group of researchers with more experience and job security, it is reasonable to expect more ambitious theory-building research efforts (Webster 2005). Long-term, we should develop a disciplinary culture where scholarly book writing and/or monograph development are considered an important element for advancement to senior endowed positions. This will signal, to all members of the discipline, the value placed on ambitious theory development efforts.

Conclusion: Intellectual Renewal in a Maturing Discipline

Although progress continues to be made on multiple fronts in the marketing discipline, the decline of conceptual articles weakens the theoretical core of our discipline. Therefore, concerted efforts aimed at intellectual renewal are needed that can reverse the trends reported in this paper. To provide a foundation for such efforts, and to enhance our understanding of largely

unexplored long-term trends and scholarship patterns pertaining to conceptual articles in marketing, this article contributes to the literature by: (1) presenting a framework for understanding the multi-faceted roles of conceptual articles and revitalizing the development of such articles in our field; (2) delineating theory-building strategies reflected in some of the most-highly cited conceptual articles in marketing; (3) examining thirty years (1978-2007) of publishing data regarding conceptual articles from major marketing journals; and (4) identifying the substantive focus and impact of all 234 conceptual articles appearing in *JM* during this thirty-year time period.

Looking at shifts in the proportion of conceptual articles across the years, the steepest, sustained decline has occurred in the case of *JM*, a journal with a long legacy of publishing conceptual, theory-building articles in the marketing discipline. Although the first signs of this trend appeared during the early 1990s, the decline has been most pronounced during the past decade. It is noteworthy that this decline has occurred despite rising concerns about the potential marginalization of the marketing discipline (see, e.g., Day 1992; Stewart 1999; Webster 2005) and repeated calls over the years in the journal's editorials highlighting the significance of, and need for, such contributions. This trend also stands in stark contrast to the spirited call for more conceptual articles that the *AMA Task Force on Knowledge Development* (Monroe et al. 1988) made after four years of deliberations.

To meet the theory development needs of our discipline, the richness and range of research approaches must match the complexity of the maturing discipline's substantive domain. To accomplish this, the discipline must strike a sustainable, synergistic balance between conceptual and empirical articles—*both* forms of scholarship are essential. Understanding, creating, and maintaining this balance is of utmost significance for a discipline as it represents

the discipline's priorities and collective mindset that fuels its intellectual endeavors. In marketing, long-term trends presented in this paper suggest that this balance appears to have shifted significantly, especially during the past decade. Therefore, although our discipline's major journals continue to thrive, and nothing seems amiss on the surface, there is a pressing need for reflection and discussion on how a sustainable balance between different forms of scholarship can be restored.

To be effective, the initiatives proposed in this paper will require sustained, multi-pronged efforts. Change does not come easily in a discipline, as there is no central accountable entity. Therefore, by necessity, this responsibility has to be shared collectively by everyone. Scholars must make room for conceptual articles in their research priorities, doctoral programs must be redesigned, a new flagship journal dedicated to conceptual articles must be launched, and prevailing promotion and tenure practices must be critically reexamined. *Theory Pre-conferences* and/or special sessions focused exclusively on theory development and assessment in different substantive areas should be institutionalized as permanent features of national conferences. Synergies between such programs, and the proposed new flagship journal, also should be explored. If the grassroots initiative suggested here don't yield results, the discipline must consider other forms of interventions (e.g., from external entities such as the AACSB in the case of doctoral programs) that may prove to be more effective in creating incentives for change.

Knowledge development processes, and how a discipline allocates its scarce research energies across different forms of scholarship, are subject to considerable inertial forces. Clearly, there are no quick or easy answers to the problems and challenges discussed in this paper. However, although possible solutions may emerge slowly, it is imperative that we remain engaged in this dialogue.

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TABLE 1
Theory Development Strategies of Exemplar Conceptual Articles

Theory Development Strategies	Brief Description	Selected Exemplars
A. Initiating Theory Development		
Use analogy	Compare with another problem/domain where prior knowledge exists	Hoffman and Novak (1996) Day (1994) Bhattacharya and Sen (2003)
Invoke a theory type	Leverage an established theory to explore a new, unexplained phenomenon	Stern and Reve (1980) Deshpandé and Webster (1989) Keller (1993)
Use interrelations	Combine previously unconnected fields or bodies of knowledge	Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey (1998) Kohli and Jaworski (1990) Berry, Seiders, and Grewal (2002) Alba et al. (1997)
Move to another level of analysis	Switch level of analysis to explore a focal phenomenon	Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987) Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) Varadarajan, Jayachandran, and White (2001) Vargo and Lusch (2004)
B. Theory Assessment and Enhancement		
Review and critique a focal theory	Benchmark a focal theory against well-established criteria for evaluating theories	Gaski (1984) Rindfleisch and Heide (1997) Day, Shocker, and Srivastava (1979)
Develop theoretical enhancements to address mixed/ambiguous evidence	Isolate patterns in anomalies and/or mixed findings to justify proposed theoretical enhancements	Hunt and Morgan (1995) Kerin, Varadarajan, and Peterson (1992) Dickson (1992)
Identify and address gaps in extant conceptualizations	Add missing antecedents, mediating processes, and/or constructs	Frazier (1993) Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan (1986) MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski (1991)

Notes: (1) Exemplar articles represent some of the most-highly cited and/or award-winning *JM* articles for 1978-2007. They were selected primarily because they are useful for illustrating specific theory development strategies. There are numerous other influential articles that may also be appropriate in this regard. (2) Theory development strategies can share certain similarities and exemplar articles often rely on a combination of these strategies. Showing an exemplar article with a specific strategy simply implies a greater reliance on that strategy. While multiple exemplar articles are shown associated with each strategy, only a selected number of such articles are discussed in the text (the first two articles from each set). (3) In addition to crafting conceptual articles, the strategies suggested in this table can also be employed for developing and strengthening the theory section of empirical articles.

TABLE 2
Summary of Publishing Trends Related to Conceptual Articles (1978-2007)

Journals/Articles	1978-1982	1983-1987	1988-1992	1993-1997	1998-2002	2003-2007
<i>A. Journal of Marketing (JM)</i>						
Total Articles	222	187	136	147	147	209
Conceptual Articles (N) ^a	58	57	47	33	25	14
Conceptual Articles (%)	26.13	30.48	34.56	22.45	17.01	6.70
<i>B. Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)</i>						
Total Articles	306	188	199	198	193	239
Conceptual Articles (N) ^a	6	1	2	10	2	10
Conceptual Articles (%)	1.96	0.53	1.01	5.05	1.04	4.18
<i>C. Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)</i>						
Total Articles	227	232	233	195	181	310
Conceptual Articles (N) ^a	25	25	9	14	22	8
Conceptual Articles (%)	11.01	10.78	3.86	7.18	12.15	2.58
<i>D. Marketing Science (MKS)</i>						
Total Articles	16	129	133	132	131	229
Conceptual Articles (N) ^a	2	28	54	37	40	64
Conceptual Articles (%)	12.50	21.71	40.60	28.03	30.53	27.95
<i>E. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (JAMS)</i>						
Total Articles	169	195	176	149	145	183
Conceptual Articles (N) ^a	42	36	42	36	50	21
Conceptual Articles (%)	24.85	18.46	23.86	24.16	34.48	11.48

^a Relationship between publishing patterns (conceptual, non-conceptual) and five-year time periods is significant at $p < .05$ for *MKS* and $p < .01$ for all other journals. The test statistic χ^2 is as follows: *JM* ($\chi^2(5) = 52.58$), *JMR* ($\chi^2(5) = 15.57$), *JCR* ($\chi^2(5) = 28.65$), *MKS* ($\chi^2(4) = 12.10$), and *JAMS* ($\chi^2(5) = 27.62$).

Notes: (1) *Journal of Marketing* published an additional fifth issue in 1999 (with Marketing Science Institute) to commemorate the new millennium. This special issue featured 17 conceptual articles and is included in the 1998-2002 period. (2) *Marketing Science* published its inaugural issue in 1982. Therefore, data in the first column for this journal refer only to this year. Analytical articles aimed primarily at theory development were categorized as conceptual articles.

TABLE 3
Substantive Focus of Conceptual Articles in the *Journal of Marketing* (1978-2007)

Substantive Focus	Conceptual Articles							
	1978-1987		1988-1997		1998-2007		1978-2007 (Overall)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A. MARKETING ENVIRONMENT								
Consumer Behavior	13	11.30	3	3.75	5	12.82	21	8.97
Legal, Political & Economic Issues	13	11.30	6	7.50	0	0.00	19	8.12
Ethics and Social Responsibility	4	3.48	4	5.00	2	5.13	10	4.27
B. MARKETING FUNCTIONS								
Management, Planning & Strategy	24	20.87	20	25.00	14	35.90	58	24.79
Retailing	1	0.87	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.43
Channels of Distribution	6	5.22	1	1.25	1	2.56	8	3.42
Electronic Marketing	0	0.00	1	1.25	1	2.56	2	0.85
Physical Distribution	1	0.87	1	1.25	0	0.00	2	0.85
Pricing	2	1.74	1	1.25	2	5.13	5	2.14
Product	6	5.22	3	3.75	4	10.26	13	5.56
Sales Promotion	1	0.87	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.43
Advertising	9	7.83	4	5.00	2	5.13	15	6.41
Personal Selling	2	1.74	1	1.25	0	0.00	3	1.28
Sales Management	1	2.61	1	1.25	1	2.56	3	2.14
C. SPECIAL MARKETING APPLICATIONS								
Industrial	1	0.87	1	1.25	4	10.26	6	2.56
Nonprofit, Political & Social Causes	2	1.74	1	1.25	1	2.56	4	1.71
International & Comparative	0	0.00	1	1.25	0	0.00	1	0.43
Services	3	2.61	3	3.75	1	2.56	7	2.99
D. MARKETING RESEARCH								
Theory & Philosophy of Science	20	17.39	20	25.00	1	2.56	41	17.52
Research Methodology	3	2.61	3	3.75	0	0.00	6	2.56
Information Technology	1	0.87	2	2.50	0	0.00	3	1.28
E. OTHER TOPICS								
Educational & Professional Issues	2	1.74	4	5.00	0	0.00	6	2.56
		100%		100%		100%		100%

Notes: "Other Topics" (panel E) also includes "General Marketing," but no conceptual articles belonging primarily to this sub-category were identified.

TABLE 4
Citations of Conceptual Articles in *Journal of Marketing*

Year	Citations		Percentage of Citations from Conceptual Articles (A)	Percentage of Articles that are Conceptual (B)	(A – B)
	All Articles	Conceptual Articles			
1978	739	210	28.42	25.49	2.93
1979	1489	350	23.51	21.05	2.45
1980	756	433	57.28	22.50	34.78
1981	1984	455	22.93	32.00	-9.07
1982	1783	561	31.46	27.91	3.56
1983	1863	810	43.48	35.71	7.76
1984	1332	386	28.98	18.18	10.08
1985	2639	1290	48.88	20.41	28.47
1986	1341	807	60.18	43.33	16.85
1987	2717	1537	56.57	39.39	17.18
1988	2234	1321	59.13	50.00	9.13
1989	2270	720	31.72	22.22	9.50
1990	5039	1474	29.25	24.14	5.11
1991	1401	468	33.40	36.36	-2.96
1992	2758	1183	42.89	38.46	4.43
1993	3017	605	20.05	17.24	2.81
1994	5181	1038	20.03	17.65	2.39
1995	2231	829	37.16	25.00	12.16
1996	2538	673	26.52	29.03	-2.52
1997	1752	490	27.97	24.00	3.97
1998	1918	355	18.51	13.79	4.72
1999	1985	751	37.83	34.15	3.69
2000	1198	154	12.85	8.33	4.52
2001	789	11	1.39	8.00	-6.61
2002	967	107	11.07	10.71	0.35
2003	711	45	6.33	3.13	3.20
2004	835	217	25.99	10.81	15.18
2005	524	36	6.87	8.33	-1.46
2006	191	3	1.57	2.38	-0.81
2007	57	2	3.51	8.00	-4.49

Notes: (1) All citation data are from the Social Sciences Citation Index (July 2008). (2) Positive values in the last column indicate that conceptual articles, relative to their numbers in a given year, contributed disproportionately more citations that year. Due to the recency of citation data from the last five (2003-2007) years, these data are less likely to fully reflect the impact of articles.

TABLE 5
Understanding and Addressing the Decline of Conceptual Articles in the Marketing Discipline

Disciplinary Entities and Characteristics	Functions Performed that May Lead to Long-Term Shifts in Scholarship Patterns	Recommendations to Spur the Development and Publication of Conceptual Articles
<p>Current Generation of Scholars</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability • Motivation • Paradigmatic values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop research priorities (substantive, conceptual, and methodological domains) • Design and maintain doctoral programs • Mentor new colleagues and doctoral students • Contribute reviewer expertise to journals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen senior faculty’s leadership on this issue at department, college, and discipline levels • Increase professional efforts devoted to reflect on, and reinvest in, the discipline’s conceptual domain
<p>Doctoral Programs and Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program content and structure • Dissertation formats • Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize and provide research skills (substantive, conceptual, and methodological domains) • Establish research program for the next generation of researchers • Initiate the development of paradigmatic values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign doctoral programs to restore pedagogical balance between substantive, conceptual, and methodological domains • Create more flexibility in dissertation formats to provide opportunities for deeper theory development • Develop post-graduation curriculum guidelines for new faculty who hold doctoral degrees outside marketing
<p>Journals, Reviewers, and Review Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type, number, and reputation of journals • Expertise profile of reviewers and editors • Clarity of review procedures in the substantive, conceptual, and methodological domains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as a knowledge gatekeeper for the discipline • Signal via published research the relative significance of substantive, conceptual, and methodological domains • Establish and reinforce discipline’s paradigmatic values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create dedicated space in flagship journals to research focusing on the discipline’s conceptual domain • Launch a new flagship journal dedicated to conceptual articles • Organize Theory Pre-Conferences to strengthen intellectual culture that values theoretical contributions • Develop guidelines to provide reviewers more clarity regarding the evaluation of conceptual articles

(Table continued on next page)

TABLE 5 (Continued)
Understanding and Addressing the Decline of Conceptual Articles in the Marketing Discipline

Disciplinary Entities and Characteristics	Functions Performed that May Lead to Long-Term Shifts in Scholarship Patterns	Recommendations to Spur the Development and Publication of Conceptual Articles
Promotion, Tenure, and Incentive Systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance benchmarks • Procedural characteristics • External and internal rewards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specify characteristics of impactful scholarship • Establish and reinforce discipline's paradigmatic values • Signal journals' reputation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate the significance of theoretical contributions in the P&T process • Alleviate P&T pressures by developing a post-doctoral program and experimenting with an extended P&T clock • Create a culture of scholarly book writing and monograph development for advancement to senior endowed positions

Notes: The table focuses primarily on those disciplinary components whose activities are likely to directly impact the development and publication of conceptual articles. There are other disciplinary components (e.g., professional associations) that can, through their programs and priorities, have an indirect effect. To conserve space, a separate detailed discussion of such components is not presented. Instead, where appropriate, pertinent issues are discussed in conjunction with other disciplinary components.

TABLE 6
Guidelines for Evaluating Conceptual Articles

General Evaluation Criteria	Specific Considerations that Merit Special Attention When Evaluating Conceptual Articles	Additional Remarks and Suggestions
Exposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Conceptual clarity</i>: Precise definitions and descriptions of constructs provided • <i>Internal consistency</i>: Arguments cohere and do not contain logical contradictions and/or tautologies 	<p>Theoretical meaningfulness of constructs is established in three realms: conceptual, linguistic, and physical (Teas 1997). These three realms pertain, respectively, to thoughts, terminology, and objects (measures). Conceptual articles rely only on the first two realms to establish constructs' theoretical meaningfulness.</p> <p>Skipper and Hyman (1987) show how <i>sententional calculus</i>, an analytic technique from philosophy, can be used to systematically examine conceptual arguments and verify that they are free from logical contradictions and/or tautologies.</p>
Theory Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Integration</i>: Effective combination of constructs and key theoretical arguments to develop the proposed conceptualization • <i>Rationale</i>: Compelling justification for theoretical components such as constructs and relationships is presented • <i>Theoretical precision</i>: Theoretical arguments provide precise and empirically testable predictions about key outcomes • <i>Crafting</i>: Effective use of theory development strategies 	<p>The key challenge here is to determine how existing constructs and/or relationships can be used as building blocks to enhance our understanding of a focal phenomenon. The intended theoretical contribution can be made along several dimensions pertaining to a focal phenomenon—e.g., what, how, why, where, and when (Whetten 1989).</p> <p>The theory building approach must be free from what Darden (1991) refers to as a “conceptual adhocness.” The decision to add or remove theoretical components (constructs, relationships) should be based on logic and/or literature.</p> <p>The ability to make precise predictions about when and where specific outcomes may occur strengthen conceptual arguments—especially if these predictions are novel or go against prevailing evidence (Darden 1991).</p> <p>Theory development strategies described in Table 1 can also serve as a basis for evaluating how creatively or effectively conceptual arguments have been crafted.</p>

(Table continued on next page)

