



Marketing's next era: The scope and impact of marketing's future, the reach and legacy of Shelby Hunt

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ABSTRACT

Shelby Hunt's career epitomized the ideal of substantive contributions and lasting impact. Moreover, his work stands as exemplary for how meaningful theoretical and conceptual academic research is done. This paper takes up what may arguably be Hunt's last and most significant research agenda, the future of marketing. Hunt's final research program was essentially a response to marketing's past, an evaluation of its present state, and thoughtful conjectures on possible trajectories into its future. Building on this work, the authors reassess the progress of marketing relative to other business disciplines by updating the citation analysis of Clark et al. (2014). The authors also take up Hunt's third prescription for the re-institutionalization of the field as it enters Era V by offering recommendations for the reform of marketing doctoral programs. Finally, the paper takes up and extends Hunt's seminal R-A theory and applies it to, 1) shed light on the discipline's declining influence and competitive disadvantage, and 2) shed light on Hunt's own success and competitive advantage as a scholar.

1. Introduction

Shelby Hunt passed away in July 2022. In the months before his passing, the authors conducted a lengthy virtual meeting with him, enjoying a wide-ranging discussion on his professional life and work. In that conversation, Hunt told the authors that he regarded his work on "Era V" (Hunt 2020, Hunt et al., 2021), as among the most important of his long career, and possibly the most vital of topics for our discipline. Unfortunately, he was taken from us before he could fully develop his thoughts on the topic. Briefly, and in advance of a fuller explanation, in his work on Era V, Hunt builds on the 4-stage periodization of marketing's evolution proposed by Wilkie and Moore (2003, 2006). In this paper, we attempt to summarize the background to Hunt's thinking on Era V, and then to extend some of the points he was only able to sketch out before his work was unexpectedly cut short. We begin with the background against which Hunt's thinking on Era V emerged.

The Context of Hunt's Era V.

In our theory seminar in marketing, we were required to read Ralph Biggadike's 1981 AMR article "The Contributions of Marketing to Strategic Management." Biggadike's scathing critique of academic

marketing culminated in his conclusion that

"...many marketers today are not scientists in the theory-building sense but technological virtuosi in solving problems at a brand or, occasionally, product level.

This... leaves me both optimistic and pessimistic. I am optimistic in believing that marketers have concepts and tools to attack strategic management issues. I am pessimistic in doubting that this attack will lead to theory, primarily because of the data acquisition problems that all researchers in strategy face, which will therefore perpetuate ad hoc, firm-specific, problem-oriented research. Also, I am not convinced that many marketers are interested in raising their level of aggregation to the business-unit or industry-unit level and their time horizon to the long run. It is reasonably straightforward to apply a quantitative technique to a brand over the next twelve months. It is far less straightforward to apply the same technique to a product class over the next five, ten, or twenty years" (p. 631).

Biggadike's criticism both wounded and motivated many young marketing scholars. We brooded over it for years, resenting the bold

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impertinence of this interloper from academic management who dared level such criticism at our beloved marketing! And yet, over time, nagging doubts emerged. We began to note, and later to collect the worrying comments of leading marketing scholars, scattered across our top journals, that seemed to partially corroborate Biggadike's criticism. However, these comments were unconnected, and unexplained. A few examples will suffice to show the tone and variety of the concerns expressed by marketing scholars. For example, [Reibstein et al. \(2009\)](#) note the poaching encroachments of management into traditional marketing topics, observing that.

"...[management] strategy field has successfully imported fundamental marketing concepts such as business and market selection, business and revenue model definition, segmentation, positioning, innovation, and diffusion processes, and value propositions, making them more useful to real managers...Through a process of benign neglect, academic marketing has left voids that other fields have filled" (p.1)

[Day \(1992\)](#) notes a general decline of marketing's voice, observing that

"...business functions and academic disciplines don't share...[the] assumption [that marketing should play a leading role in charting the strategic direction of a business] and have been actively eroding the influence of marketing in the strategy dialogue...there are few signs that this slide will be reversed in the foreseeable future: (p. 323).

More generally, [Webster \(2005\)](#) laments a loss of significance for marketing, observing that

"...marketing has lost its importance and relevance as a management function in many companies...Today [management strategy research] ...is a literature more widely read and valued by managers than the marketing literature, evidenced by the large numbers of management subscribers compared with those of marketing journals." (pp121, 122).

Providing yet another point-of-view on the state of marketing, [Clark et al. \(2014\)](#) conducted a 22-year bibliometric analysis of citation flows between the top academic journals in the core academic business disciplines: four each from Accounting, Finance and Management, and five from Marketing. Their finding was that the marketing journals were the least influential,

"... accounting for only 8 % of total [citation] exports to the other disciplines... [while] finance is the most influential, accounting for 48 % of total exports to the other disciplines... [Marketing's] lack of influence is also evident in that in the 22 years studied, it exported only 12 citations to the leading finance journals, and 237 to the accounting journals. Moreover, during the same period [marketing] imported only 797 citations from the finance and 303 from the accounting journals... [marketing's] lack of influence... is significant... for at least three reasons: (1) it has persisted for a long time, (2) it is paradoxical in that although the various functions of the firm are putatively synergistically interconnected, this analysis suggests, at least from the academic side, that they are not, and (3) whatever insight, research, innovation, or observations... [marketing] has developed over the years seems to have had little impact on finance or accounting" (p. 228)

Attempting to throw a net around the scattered concerns relating to the state of marketing, [Clark et al. \(2014\)](#), discern three large themes: 1) a failure to define marketing sufficiently well, resulting in domain confusion (e.g., [Varadarajan & Jayachandran, 1999](#)); 2) inappropriate level of analysis in marketing studies (e.g. [Biggadike 1981](#); [Webster 2005](#)); and 3) a quantitative and methodological obsession that, while producing highly sophisticated models and analysis, delivers trivial results (e.g. [Biggadike 1981](#); [Piercy 2002](#); [Reibstein et al. 2009](#)). While this summary is helpful, it lacks a comprehensive and compelling diagnosis of the problem. If the authors of such scattered comments are to be

believed, symptoms abound. However, it remains far from clear what exactly marketing's problem is.

In efforts to gain clarity on the situation, a number of scholars¹ began organizing special sessions at the Academy of Marketing Science Annual Conference. Starting in 2014 and continuing through 2022, these special sessions explored the nature, extent, consequences and possible solutions to the apparent marginalization, and declining influence of marketing. These efforts culminated in a 2020 *ASR Review* set of five essays bundled into an article, entitled "Marketing's Theoretical and Conceptual Value Proposition: Opportunities to Address Marketing's Influence" ([Key et al. 2020](#)). The editor of *AMS Review* (Stephen Vargo) solicited six commentaries on these essays, including contributions from Russel Belk, Ruth Bolton, Julia Fehrer, Tomas Hult and Forrest Morgeson, Rajan Varadarajan, and Shelby Hunt. These commentaries both critiqued the article/essays and advanced their own thoughts on the state of the field. However, Hunt's commentary was of a different order than the others, rising above mere commentary and detached conjecture, it offered a sweeping analysis of the situation, and the problems, and mapped out a road to recovery.

2. Shelby Hunt and the riddle of marketing

[Hunt's 2020](#) commentary / article, "For re-institutionalizing the marketing discipline in Era V," left observation and analysis of the various symptoms of marketing's state to the others. Summing up the entire situation in a sentence, he simply observed that for "... several decades, commentaries on the marketing discipline have found it to be significantly troubled" (p. 189). In support of that statement, Hunt cites 11 papers, including one of his own (thus including himself as one of the troubled observers). His summation is that if the "... [*AMS Review*] commentary and its predecessors are on target, then the discipline faces a problematic future" (ibid). Turning away from symptoms, Hunt takes up the canvas of history to elucidate the situation more comprehensively. His canvas is laid out as follows:

"[Wilkie and Moore \(2003, 2006\)](#) trace the marketing discipline's evolution through four major Eras: (I) Founding the Field (1900–1920), (II) Formalizing the Field (1920–1950), (III) A Paradigm Shift – Marketing, Management, and the Sciences (1950–1980), and (IV) A Fragmentation of the Mainstream (1980–present). Hunt... [[Hass and Manis, 2021](#)] ...supplements their periodization by creating a "five stages model" that ends their Era IV in 2020 and proposes a future Era V (2020–?). In each Era, the discipline's nature, scope, central focus, and institutional status changed significantly...Do the troubles identified in the [*AMS Review*] commentaries portend the marketing discipline's *de-institutionalization* in Era IV (1980–2020) and its potential *re-institutionalization* in Era V (2020–?)?" (Ibid, p. 189).

Against this sweeping backdrop, Hunt succinctly and convincingly, albeit with broad brush strokes, offers a compelling context for a deeper understanding of the problems posed by the five *AMS Review* essays, their commentators, and similar concerns scattered across the marketing literature. Picking up his argument where Wilkie and Moore leave off, Hunt begins his diagnosis, noting that in that in.

"...Era IV (1980–2020), the marketing discipline lost its mainstream, central focus and fragmented into a loosely-related composite of four separately-institutionalized areas [consumer behavior, quantitative/modeling, marketing management/strategy, and macromarketing]" (p. 195).

Hunt's generalization is supported by three considerations: 1) that the largest *presumed* sub-discipline of marketing—consumer

¹ Including Terry Clark, O.C. Ferrell, Michael Hartline, Shelby Hunt, Astrid Keel, Martin Key, Mark Peterson, Leyland Pitt, Jagdish Sheth, David Stewart,

behavior—does not in fact focus on marketing-relevant issues and should not therefore be viewed as a sub-discipline at all: 2) that because the quantitative/modelling area, another putative sub-discipline, is also not centered on marketing issues and problems, but on the development and refinement of mathematical techniques, it should not be counted as a sub-discipline either; and that 3) because 75 % of the doctoral students in supposedly marketing sub-disciplines in fact identify with either consumer behavior or quantitative modeling, the field is on a very dysfunctional trajectory because:

“...the four areas that comprise the marketing discipline—consumer behavior, quantitative/modeling, marketing management/strategy, and macromarketing—are not producing doctoral students [in sufficient numbers with] ... sufficient theoretical, empirical, and historical knowledge of marketing for the discipline to reproduce itself” (p. 196).

Reflecting these developments and citing the corroborative support of [Yadav \(2020\)](#), Hunt observes a trend for our doctoral programs to shelve their marketing-domain-specific seminars and replace them with non-marketing, especially quantitative methods, seminars. The result is an enfeebled field that: 1) has lost its central focus by fragmenting into a loosely-related composite of four separately-institutionalized areas; 2) is producing doctoral students who identify with those non-marketing sub-fields rather than marketing; 3) fails to immerse its doctoral students in the substantive richness of the field’s historical mainstream literature; such that 4) the field can no longer reproduce itself.

Hunt’s diagnosis provides a theoretical framework with which to connect the scattered dots relating to concerns about marketing’s health, described in the five *AMS Review* essays, the associated commentaries and other comments spread across our literature. The historical drift of marketing into what Hunt calls *de-institutionalization* explains a number of things about the state of marketing today, including: 1) why the field seems vulnerable to encroachments from other fields, especially management; 2) why the marketing literature is largely isolated and uninfluential among the family of academic business disciplines; 3) why marketing has been losing its voice within the firm; and 4) why academic marketing is increasingly vulnerable to accusations, from within and without, of ineffectiveness and irrelevance.

Does Hunt give a reasonable account of marketing’s problems and their causes? To answer this question, and before evidence of the sort provided by the five essays and their associated commentaries can be assessed, we need to evaluate Hunt’s framework. In defense of Hunt’s approach, it is important to note that he casts a very broad conceptual net over the entire field, in its historical setting, employing the periodization developed by [Wilkie and Moore \(2003\)](#). Thus, avoiding a piecemeal anecdotal approach focused on temporally localized evidence, Hunt is able to gain a powerful point-of-view on the evolution of the field as a whole, from 1900 to the present. Taking this approach, Hunt avoids inevitable parochial pitfalls that would likely mislead any attempt to diagnose marketing’s problems based on only part of the field.

Based on his assessment of the past, Hunt proceeds to posit an Era V in marketing’s development—from 2020-? The locus of Hunt’s analysis is the notion of *institutionalization*, *de-institutionalization* and *re-institutionalization*. Hunt borrows the concept of institutionalization from [Thackray and Merton \(1972\)](#), who argue that the

“...certain features [of institutionalization] may be delineated... [including] the set of shifts that a field of learning experiences as it changes from being a diffuse, unfocused area of inquiry... tangential to the true intellectual concerns of its...[adherents], to being a conceptually discrete discipline, able to command its own tools, techniques, methodologies, intellectual orientations, and problematics... [creation of] a cognitive identity...for a discipline requires more than the building of an infrastructure of journals, reference works, teaching texts, advanced monographs, and bibliographic aids.

It also requires the formation of that sense of common orientation and purpose which both springs from and nourishes agreement on central problems and on the relevant techniques of conceptualization and analysis. Similarly, the creation of a professional identity is not guaranteed by the formation of learned societies... necessary though these are. It also requires the recruitment of followers and students and more especially the creation of satisfactory career structures... [which] cannot be directly commanded or engineered” (pp. 473, 494).

Employing this notion of institutionalization (and by implication, its *de-* and *re-* variants), Hunt reasons that marketing became

“... institutionalized as an academic discipline in Era II (1920–1950), with departments in colleges of business, textbooks, journals, and a professional society. The discipline’s mainstream, central focus was on marketing systems (what is now called macromarketing), which provided it a “cognitive identity” ([Thackray & Merton 1972](#)). The discipline could reproduce itself in Era II because its doctoral students were steeped in the subject of marketing systems, the central focus of the discipline. The marketing discipline was re-institutionalized in Era III (1950–1980). The mainstream, central focus of the discipline shifted to marketing management/strategy, with due attention to macromarketing issues. As a consequence, the discipline had a new cognitive identity. The discipline’s research turned toward social science research methods, and many new journals and professional societies were formed. The discipline in Era III could reproduce itself because its doctoral programs stressed marketing management/strategy and research methods for addressing managerial issues,” (p. 196).

Hunt judges the field to have been initially institutionalized during Era II (1920–1950), to have been re-institutionalized during Era III (1950–1980), and to have fragmented into 4 more-or-less separately institutionalized sub-disciplines (consumer behavior, quantitative/modelling, marketing management/strategy and macromarketing) in Era IV (1980–2020). This leaves a distinct and marked reckoning within the discipline of marketing concerning what and how to move into an Era V (2020-?) that provides a fruitful and relevant foundation for the next thirty plus years of impact.

3. Marketing’s influence, bankruptcy, & theory

A central issue in the consideration of Era V concerns the state of the marketing discipline and the degree to which it wields actual influence. In other words, does academic marketing produce meaningful knowledge that impacts actual firm-performance, as compared to other business disciplines and managerial toolsets?

Despite the methodological sophistication of high-quality academic marketing studies, there seems to be little consensus of how and to what degree (if at all) marketing activities impact firm performance and strategy execution. Looking at the issue from a different point of view, [Clark et al.’s \(2014\)](#) 1990–2011 bibliometric analysis of citation flows between top academic business journals suggests an alternative approach to further elucidate Hunt’s Era V. For the years 1990–2011, that study found marketing to be least influential of the core academic business disciplines. A reasonable question to ask as our discipline enters Era V is this changing?

3.1. Marketing’s influence in Era V

Generally speaking, academic journals are created and exist for academic readers. By-and-large, academic marketing readers read journal articles both as part of their professional preparation in doctoral programs, as well as for possible input in the composition of their own academic work. Presumably, the number of times an article is cited in subsequent articles is a fair measure of the article’s influence. At one

extreme, an article that is never quoted, cited, or alluded to will be deemed uninfluential, while one that is cited many times will be judged influential. However, the issue is more complicated than casual examination suggests.² All methodologies, citation analysis included, have some shortcomings (e.g., Baumgartner & Pieters, 2003). Nevertheless, it remains one of the most widely accepted methods to measure and evaluate the influence of published academic texts. Indeed, an entire scientific discipline, *bibliometrics*, has emerged with an array of statistical methods centered on the study of the output, impact, and influence of published research. Indeed, there have been several recent bibliometric studies that investigate the impact and influence of academic marketing articles (e.g., Baumgartner & Pieters, 2003; Donthu et al., 2020; Kim & McMillan 2008; Clark et al. 2014).

As noted above, Clark et al. (2014) assessed the citation flows (imports and exports) between important Accounting, Finance, Management and Marketing journals for the period 1990–2011. Because the Web of Science database does not curate all important journals, some could not be included in their study. As the marketing discipline enters into Era V, has the situation changed? Tables 1a and b updates Clark et al.'s (2014) study to include data for the same set of journals through 2020. A perusal of Table 1a reveals that not much has changed in the overall pattern of influence of the academic texts in marketing journals. Table 1b shows the ratio of citation exports to imports (columns) and citation imports / exports (rows) between the four areas between 1990 and 2020. Several trends in Tables 1a and b are worth noting.

While marketing enjoyed significant citation exchanges with management, management exported 3-times the number of citations into marketing than did marketing into the management journals. Undoubtedly, the volume and proportion of citation exchanges reflects the flow of ideas. Moreover, marketing remains isolated, especially with regards to Finance and Accounting. This is a surprising result given the turn toward the finance literature and finance models in marketing in recent years. This is seen in the increase of 184 finance citation imports into the set of marketing journals during 2012–2020 over the 1990–2011 period. Although the finance journals increased imports of marketing citations, from a mere 12 during 1990–2012 to 100 across 2012–2020, for a total of 112 across the 31-year period, the influence of the marketing journals in finance remains remarkably low. During 1990–2011, marketing journals exported an average of 1 citation per year into the finance journals. This increased to an average of 11 per year during 2012–2020. At the same time, marketing's imported citations from finance grew from an average of 36 during 1990–2011 to an average of 109 during 2012–2020. If citations are taken to be a fair representation of the flow of ideas, we are forced to conclude that while the flow of ideas from finance increase in marketing journals, the reverse is not the case. Clearly, this is a symptom of marketing's condition as described by Hunt as it enters into Era V. But why is the field not influential?

Interestingly, Table 1b (bottom row) show that Marketing's import / export ratios are all > 1, revealing that Marketing brings in a greater proportion of external ideas than do the other fields (with the exception of a management / finance import / export ratio of > 1). What this suggests is that numerous factors other than citations should be taken into account when evaluating a field's influence. Marketing has a history of borrowing ideas / theories from other disciplines, which is not the case with other fields (as Table 1b reveals) and an interesting aspect of marketing scholarship. As a result, marketing scholars are more likely to cite outside the discipline than are scholars in other areas. This bias may explain some of the lack of citations by other areas and possibly fuel a resurgence in marketing's influence.

3.2. Marketing's de-institutionalization and the challenges in Era V

Identifying the causes of marketing's continued isolation and stagnant scholarly impact have puzzled many. For Hunt, one of the significant factors leading to the discipline's drift into Era V has been the emerging dominance of mathematical modelling and advanced research methods as substantive domains *per se*. Hunt's thinking on the emergence of an Era V for the discipline began to coalesce with his 2018 *Journal of Marketing Management* article. In that article, he observes that with its long-standing tradition of research centered on micro-problems, academic marketing is hardly suited to produce useful input for strategic insight, planning and execution.

Extending Hunt's insight, Clark (in Key et al. 2020), argues that marketing has failed in its effort to produce meaningful input to the larger managerial issues, because of improperly framing its research questions. This argument is that the discipline frequently confounds well-structured with ill-structured problems. Although marketing practitioners are faced primarily with ill-structured problems, marketing academics have been preoccupied mainly with well-structured problems. In general, well-structured problems are tidy, tractable, and easily solvable, while ill-structured problems are messy, intractable, and impossible to solve definitively. For example, "...converting a Fahrenheit temperature into Celsius; inverting a mathematical matrix; and calculating the trajectory of an object's flight path..." (Clark in Key et al. 2020, p. 159) are all examples of well-structured problems, while "...solving the problem of plastic pollution in the oceans, addressing childhood obesity, and lowering the level of political rhetoric..." (ibid) are examples of ill-structured problems. Clark goes on to argue that real world marketing problems such as "... how much to spend on advertising, how to develop a strong brand, and which brand spokesperson would be best..." (ibid) are ill-structured, insofar as reasonable people will disagree on defining and analyzing the problem and will undoubtedly produce different but nonetheless acceptable solutions.

There are at least two types of irony to be found here. First, as the discipline enters Era V, and as Hunt (2020) notes, it is producing more and more doctoral students specializing in modelling and advanced methodology, and fewer who are immersed in general marketing. This investment in the direction of the field portends an increasing distance between research into well-structured problems, produced by marketing academics, and the ill-structured problems marketing practitioners face.

The second irony for the field as it enters Era V is to be found in an examination of what sorts of marketing articles are actually influential. Clark and Key (2021) address this question by examining the top cited marketing articles in the Web of Science data base (see especially Figures 3 and 4).³ Their analysis reveals that

"... seventeen of the 20 most cited marketing articles [by other marketing journals] are literature-based, theory development efforts. The remaining three of the top-cited articles are methodological in nature—introducing/finessing/extending/explaining new techniques...Putting academic marketing articles into the context of the other business-related disciplines... we observe [that] while academic marketing is the least influential of the core business disciplines... some of its articles are among the most influential of the top 20 business-related articles... [and that] four of marketing's most influential articles [in other business disciplines] are literature-based and theoretical in nature ..." (pp. 427, 428)

This analysis reveals a curious situation: marketing's culture of modelling and advanced methods may in fact be the very reason the field has been so uninfluential. Hunt's observation that, as the field enters Era V increasing the numbers of doctoral students specializing in modelling and methods signifies not what its champions presumably intend—increased influence, but rather, further isolation for the field.

² For a fuller discussion of the complicated nature of impact and influence, see Sugimoto et al. (2017); Andrés (2009).

³ Sourced from Web of Knowledge on 04/13/2021.

Table 1a

Citation Flows Between Major Accounting, Finance, Management, and Marketing Journals 1990–2020.

Importing Field	Exporting Field											
	1990–2011				2012–2020				1990–2020			
	ACCT	FIN	MAN	MKTG	ACCT	FIN	MAN	MKTG	ACCT	FIN	MAN	MKTG
ACCT	37,941	9,427	2,499	237	29,751	11,601	1,797	350	67,692	21,028	4,296	587
FIN	3,872	76,035	168	12	4,368	68,604	3,873	100	8,240	144,639	4,041	112
MAN	783	3,710	66,613	2,237	991	358	54,096	1,266	1,774	4,068	120,709	3,503
MKTG	303	797	5,636	60,577	324	981	3,875	45,539	627	1,778	9,511	106,116

Table 1b

Citation Import/Export Ratios 1990–2020.

Importing Field	Exporting Field			
	ACCT	FIN	MAN	MKTG
ACCT		2.435	3.192	0.782
FIN	0.411		0.045	0.015
MAN	0.313	22.083		
MKTG	1.278	66.417	2.519	

3.3. Obituary or bankruptcy for marketing?

Hunt sketches a daunting picture of marketing as it enters Era V: fragmented, de-institutionalized, unable to reproduce itself and increasing irrelevant. After reading his analysis, one might be tempted to write an obituary for the discipline. However, [Hunt \(2020\)](#) describes a bankrupt field, not a dead one. Because Hunt's prognosis is bankruptcy and not death, he sketched out a path for the discipline to recover, urging that the field: 1) restructure itself towards a mainstream, central focus; 2) reconcile with the splintering consumer behavior sub-discipline; and 3) revamp its doctoral programs so that our students graduate with a strong grounding and understanding of marketing's theoretical, empirical, and historical knowledge-content. Unfortunately, Shelby Hunt passed away before he was able to fully flesh out the project he began. In this section, we hope to continue where Hunt's thinking left off and contribute to marketing's return from intellectual and reputational insolvency. In this endeavor, we will focus on the nature of the discipline's bankruptcy and on the wisdom of Hunt's advice.

3.4. Marketing's bankruptcy

Work by [Eisend \(2015\)](#) sheds light on an interesting aspect of marketing's bankruptcy as it enters into Era V:

"...the increase in [marketing] knowledge [presently] occurs at a decreasing rate, and marketing knowledge has reached a stage of maturity.... The more mature a research field, the less groundbreaking its new findings, which therefore leads to less increase in knowledge....." (p. 37)

In a time when the field is investing increasingly in and rewarding mathematical modelling and advanced methods, Eisend's notion of *groundbreaking research* is particularly telling. By definition, research that is groundbreaking is simultaneously valuable and influential. Perusal of Figures 3 and 4 in [Clark and Key \(2021\)](#) suggests what sort of research by marketing scholars has in fact been most groundbreaking, and it is not primarily the exquisite quantitative studies that abound in marketing.

Eisend's notion that the production of groundbreaking knowledge may be declining, is developed further and more generally by [Bloom et al. \(2020\)](#), who argue that in many academic "...contexts and at various levels of disaggregation, research effort is rising substantially, while research productivity is declining sharply" (p. 1104–1105). This distinction between research effort (# of articles published) and productivity (# of groundbreaking papers), describes what Eisend observed

about marketing. Bloom et al., who are economists and are developing their arguments to explore research in society in general, postulate the following growth model for research:

$$\text{Economic Growth} = \text{Research Productivity} \times \text{Number of Researchers}$$

e.g., 2 % or 5 % ↓ (falling) ↑ (rising)

In this model, Bloom et al. use the terms "research productivity" and "number of researchers" as proxies for research effort and groundbreaking ideas produced, respectfully. The authors find this relationship to hold across a broad cross-section of research contexts, including pharmaceuticals, patents, agriculture, technology, and medicine. Their conclusion that "...research productivity is declining at a substantial rate in virtually every place we look" (p. 1109), is based on their argument that as research intensity (# of researchers + # of research efforts) increases, the more difficult it becomes to find groundbreaking ideas. They argue that for the current production of ideas to be sustained, the research effort has to be greatly enhanced to offset the increasing difficulty of finding new groundbreaking ideas. This also is [Eisend's \(2015\)](#) conjecture about what is happening in marketing. Bloom et al. work from a mining analogy used widely in endogenous growth studies. The analogy goes as follows: in a newly discovered gold mine, the first ounce extracted is the easiest and cheapest because it is near the surface and is straightforward to extract. However, as the mine gets deeper, extraction becomes more difficult, and costs per ounce to extract more costly. At some point, the incremental cost of extracting one additional ounce of gold will equal its selling price and the mine will be abandoned. This analogy helps us apply Bloom et al.'s production function (as also implied by Eisend) to interpret the state of academic marketing, where the equation becomes something like:

$$\text{Groundbreaking Marketing Ideas} = f(\text{Research Productivity} \times \text{Number of Researchers})$$

However, if as seems to be the case, that despite increases in the numbers of researchers, journals, and research projects in marketing, the production of groundbreaking ideas is, as [Eisend \(2015\)](#) observes, declining, and if, as [Clark et al. \(2014\)](#) observe, the field's research is remarkably uninfluential (with interesting exceptions), we may have pinpointed possible explanations of the field's bankruptcy. It should be noted that this bankruptcy of ideas and influence isn't limited to subject matter, but also, and fundamentally, to the methodological approach embraced by the field over the past 40 years (e.g., [Biggadike 1981](#); [Clark et al. 2014](#); [Key et al. 2020](#); [Hunt 2020](#), etc.).

[Bloom et al.'s \(2020\)](#) mining analogy also offers insight, namely, that the idea/knowledge mines academic marketing has been exploring over the past decades, have paid out, and should be abandoned in favor of other more promising idea / knowledge mines. This seems also to be the gist of Hunt's Era V diagnosis and the point of his three recommendations. But, as noted, Hunt moves from diagnosis to prescription, however preliminary that prescription is. He offers three ways forward out of the field's bankruptcy at the end of Era VI: 1) establish a mainstream, central focus; 2) re-absorb splintering sub-disciplines; and 3) revamp doctoral programs. Because Hunt's first two recommendations entail an

expectation that practicing, successful researchers re-orient themselves in mid-career, we think it unlikely to take hold. However, Hunt's third recommendation offers the possibility of practical rejuvenating change.

3.5. Marketing's path out of bankruptcy in Era V

In his final article, Hunt and colleagues Madhavaram and Hatfield (2022), explain that the discipline *can* come out of its troubled trajectory by explaining that a "... discipline's renewal capability springs from its human resources (e.g., its scholars and stakeholders) and institutional resources (e.g., its journals and professional associations)" (p147). In this section, we expand on this thought with a set of suggestions on how budding marketing scholars, in PhD programs and professional associations, can bring us to a more hopeful and optimistic Era V.

PhD programs are the seedbeds for their academic disciplines: ground zero for the formation and enculturation of the next generation of scholars. Broad surveys of the field's most important literature, theories, and empirical findings are the student's traditional entrée into the range and complexities of their chosen field. These first deep dives into the scholarly literature establish the student's academic identity (e.g., as sociologist, anthropologist, economist, etc.). Literature-based seminars also provide a discipline-wide context within which students can begin to sample and then to narrow down their own budding research interests (e.g. American teen social identity; Maori culture in large New Zealand cities, exchange rate pass-through in EU-US trade, etc.).

Once students emerge from the rigors of doctoral training, they are thrust into another rite of passage: publishing. Because of the specific commitment of time and energy required to bring academic projects to completion, and because of the finite publish-or-perish timeline facing them, newly minted scholars are usually not in a position to fish around for topics, theories, and methods. For very practical reasons, such choices have usually been settled in their doctoral program. When the broadly formed novice scholar emerges from a doctoral program, they do so with a comprehensive understanding of their field and a specific and narrowly delimited set of research interests. They will pursue these interests over the subsequent 6 years, in hopes of publishing and gaining tenure.

However, in the course of that six years, growing expertise with research topic, and increasing proficiency with methodologies, entrenches commitment, and with few exceptions, sets the young scholar on a course for their entire career. The comprehensive grounding of doctoral students in their field's literature, followed by their narrowing-down to interest-based specializations, makes for a robust evolution into the field's future. On the one hand, students are exposed to a broad spectrum of topics, issues, and problems from which to sample to identify their research interest. On the other hand, having selected their topic of interest from a contextualized view of the entire field, doctoral students are equipped with the tools to research their topic more narrowly. This model will not replicate a field in the image of those who trained the students. Rather, because it mandates early exposure to a wide variety of topics, and consequently, that a wide variety of research topics are selected across the generation of emerging scholars, it fosters a sort of "natural selection process." Of course, not all topics selected will be equally successful. However, success cannot usually be predicted in advance: the combined effects of unforeseen events, changes in customer and competitive conditions, new technologies and legislation, "select" the research stream most suitable for the field's advance from generation to generation. As a result, the field reinvents itself. This is essentially what Clark et al. (2022) describe as the "emergence" effect. Emergence is a self-organizing force in the field across time as students are broadly equipped and turned loose to select their own research topics. Such an approach doesn't require sage scholars with prophetic vision to tell young scholars what the future needs of the discipline are.

Conversely, if doctoral training focuses primarily on methods and mathematical modelling, and only as an afterthought on the substantive issues of a field (as many marketing scholars believe to be the case with

our field), then the doctoral model described above breaks down. The field's healthy transition into the future becomes handicapped in several ways: 1) because broad literature surveys are absent or downplayed, the sampling space from which doctoral students choose their topic is reduced; 2) choice of a substantive topic is more likely to be guided by interest in a particular method than by a subject per se; 3) because method trumps subject, the field's transition into the future is more likely to be one of replication (albeit with refined methods) than reinvention; and 4) because the tendency with this model is to increase methods seminars at the expense of literature based seminars, the field is increasingly likely to produce,

"...technological virtuosi... [unsuited for theoretical work, but equipped for] ad hoc, firm-specific, problem-oriented research..." (Biggadike 1981, 631),

Biggadike's 40-year-old pronouncement is, in the estimation of some notable marketing scholars, truer today than it was in 1981 (e.g., Hunt, 2018b, 2020; Yadav, 2020; Key et al. 2020). Reflective of this, Bolton (2020) argues that while doctoral students may enter their program with high aspirations to create impactful research, they frequently get derailed by the discipline's methodological focus aimed at career-readiness and first job demands. Thus, doctoral students are given very practical incentives not to follow their intellectual curiosity on questions that matter, but rather, "...study well-defined problems that quickly lead to publications and a first job" (Bolton 2020, p. 176).

The first model described above, of how doctoral program structure affects the development of the field, has reinvention as the pertinent outcome. With the second model, variation is reduced (more-or-less) to methodological refinement. Barring change, academic marketing seems to be set on just such a course, promising increased methodological refinement at the cost of continuing irrelevancy and isolation.

Is this outcome inevitable? We concur with Hunt and colleagues (2022) that it is not inevitable at all. It is certainly possible to change the field from its current trajectory to a healthier one.

A reasonable approach to discipline-wide change would be to redesign the seedbeds of the discipline—its doctoral programs. It is in doctoral programs that variety of future research amongst budding scholars can most easily be encouraged simply by exposing students early in the program to our literature, in substantive seminars. The current trend of reducing marketing-centric, in favor of modelling- and methodological-centric seminars, can easily be reversed. Paradoxically, it is clear that in marketing high-impact research is more often than not conceptual and theoretical. Such work requires longer time horizons from inception to publication (see, e.g., Yadav 2010; Clark et al. 2014; Key et al. 2020; Vargo & Koskela-Huotari 2020).

In light of the foregoing discussion, we recommend several initiatives aimed at resetting marketing's doctoral programs from their current trajectory of replication driven by narrow preparation and methodological finesse, toward one of emergence and reinvention where a variety of research topics is encouraged:

- 1- Develop several literature-based marketing-centric seminars designed to provide in-depth introductions to the field for new doctoral students. This will involve the redesign of programs to reflect theory-rather than method-dominance. A review of doctoral programs' degree requirements and course offerings reveals a consistent focus on methods, statistics, and analytical techniques. Such offerings account for more than half of the course requirements in many programs. A reform in doctoral programs must start with a refocus on literature-based seminars and theory. Theory and philosophy of science develop young scholars' critical thinking to supply them with a macro view of the development of our body of knowledge. Re-introducing theory-centeredness into doctoral programs would provide a practical starting point for effective change. This isn't to say that quantitative research isn't valuable, of course it is. However, at present, theory-centered research is viewed as a less-valuable avenue for knowledge production [c.f. Hunt (2020) and Yadav (2020)].

2- Reconsider how the current program structures shape students' professional identities, and as a result, tend to fracture the field. At AMA doctoral consortia, students are often heard introducing themselves categorically, as being: "consumer behavior (CB)," "marketing strategy," and more recently, as "quant or modeler," to reflect their program emphasis and concentration. These professional identity categories have become deeply entrenched. Shelby Hunt (2020) explained how the "quant or modelers" identity category has only tangential connection to marketing, and could fit just as easily into programs emphasizing econometrics, statistics, or engineering. There could also be a consolidation of doctoral programs to help establish students' primary identity as marketing. Reflecting these considerations, the format of comprehensive examinations should be (re) evaluated for their possible impact on professional identity formation and research productivity. Ponder et al. (2004) provide a good starting point for such an investigation, detailing exam elements in 51 different institutions.

3- Incentivize students to tackle big issues. The discipline's current structure as outlined above, encourages students to emphasize tractable, well-structured, micro-focused, small-scale, hypothesis-driven research questions, with an expectation of methodologically sophisticated solutions, and direct managerial implications. However, by any standard, marketing, as a phenomena, is far from well-structured. In fact, it is expansive, very ill-structured, and has society-wide, global impact. It's interacting and overlapping systems (distribution channels, competitors, prices, customers, regulators, etc.) spill-over into every area of life. Why then, should its associated academic discipline major on studying its micro- well-structured aspects? Since the 1960 s, the discipline has devolved down to embracing a micro-managerial focus at brand and product levels. This seems unreasonable, and could account for marketing's apparent isolation and lack of influence.

Yet, well-established methodologies exist for the exploration of ill-structured, expansive questions. Why can't our students be trained in such methods? What we are describing here may appear to be an advocacy for the subfield we call macromarketing. However, it is not. As a potentially potent notion, macromarketing has been corralled and sidelined into a minor subfield. What we are calling for is for this horse called marketing be let out of the barn we have put it into.

4- Give our students broad and fresh perspectives on our field from marketing's external critics. These external critiques include: Marx [note especially, his marketing-relevant descriptions of globalization in *The Communist Manifesto* (Munzer, 1948), and his "commodity fetish" in *Capital* (1992)]; Veblen (1998), and his notion of conspicuous consumption; Galbraith (1998), and his criticisms of advertising; Adorno and Adorno (2001) and his identification of the "culture industry"; Barthes (1972), and his analysis of commercial symbols, signs and of fashion; Debord (2006), and his theory of the "Society of the Spectacle"; Baudrillard (1998) and his extensive analysis of advertising, packaging, displays, fashion, mass media and culture, the proliferation of commodities, signs and "sign-value"; Bourdieu (1984) and his ideas of symbolic goods; Bell (1976) and his predictions of the rise of the service economy and of consumerism; Douglas and Isherwood (1996), who develop a cultural lens to explore consumption, seeing it as a series of rituals; Turow (1998), who identifies societally dysfunctional effects of market segmentation; Klein (2009), who argues the destructive effects of brands, and many, many others. These external critics of marketing developed sweeping, serious, negative assessments of our field, its practices and its impacts on the world. No other area of business academia or practice seems to have attracted such persistent and vehement criticism.

While the negative vehemence of these critics may not be of great relevance to academic marketing, two aspects of their work deserve our attention: 1) that they inevitably take sweeping (i.e. macromarketing) points-of-view of our field; and 2) that they believe the field is potentially impactful, although negative. These assessments may serve as a model for our doctoral students to turn their microscopes around, from the study of managerial micro-problems, to the enormous and impactful

macro-nature of our field. Hunt et al. (2021) seem to agree with this perspective, making the case that macromarketing is indeed "...a major field in marketing's Era V...that has significant promise" (p. 41). Hunt's intention here seems to be that the discipline, rightly understood, sits somewhat upside down, with its micro-interests on top and its macro-interests at the bottom. According to its critics, marketing has a significant and impactful research landscape filled with "important and interesting" questions (Hunt et al. 2021, p. 19). Sophisticated methodologies exist for the exploration of ill-structured large issues (e.g., see Tilly 1984).

5- Encourage our doctoral students to use mathematical modelling skills in the application of *macro-marketing phenomena*. Although the use of mathematical models in marketing is often viewed negatively by critics (e.g., Key et al 2020; Hunt 2020) for its tendency to amplify the field's micro-focused tendencies, it is interesting to note that the opposite is often true in other fields. In economics, mathematical models have been successfully employed to describe macro-economic phenomena. For example, mathematical models were used to formalize Keynesian theory in the 1930 s. Similarly, Krugman (1979), developed a sweeping theoretical mathematical model of international trade. Similarly, Al-Ubaydli et al. (2023) develop a mathematical macro-model of the so-called "voltage effect," the tendency for a program's efficacy to diminish as the program is scaled up. Most of the negative critiques of marketing (noted above) are qualitative in nature. Why shouldn't our doctoral students explore them, and other macro-marketing phenomena, using mathematical models as an economist might do? Such change in academic marketing doctoral programs would require that we seriously reevaluate what is of enduring value for the future health of our discipline.

6- Redefine the role of the gatekeepers within our field. Marketing professors who teach in doctoral programs, PhD program directors, journal editors, and senior marketing mentors must refocus their efforts towards restoring the value of marketing theory publications. Marketing PhD instructors should consider a return to Hunt's work on the philosophy of science. This, along with other seminal work, would allow new doctoral students to extend marketing theory efforts and the bounds of knowledge creation that could revamp the discipline, such as R-A theory, S-D logic, etc. Likewise, journal editors and reviewers serve as gatekeepers of potential new knowledge and therefore impact the future of marketing. Overemphasis on number of studies and excessive focus on sophisticated methodology at the expense of theoretical contribution and tackling big ideas will continue to impede marketing's influence outside our own scholastic domain. Finally, and in line with Bolton (2020), we presume that none of our recommendations for the reform of doctoral programs will be possible if we fail to change how research outcomes are evaluated. If tenure requirements do not change, with lengthening turnaround times, low acceptance rates, less value on theory papers, and over-inflation with mathematical and methodologically sophisticated studies for micro-problems, at the expense of relevance, Ph.D. candidates will find themselves compelled to continue to contribute to the dysfunctional trajectory Hunt saw and produce only what is rewarded, namely well-structured, small-scale, hypothesis-based research, and sophisticated methodologies.

4. Using Hunt & Morgan's R-A theory to explain Hunt's success & the state of the marketing discipline

Over 50 years have passed since the question of whether "Marketing is a Science" (or not) was settled. Shelby Hunt was the central figure, *non-pareil*, in resolving this debate in the affirmative (1976, 1977, 1981). Since then, Hunt emerged as one of the most influential theory-makers in academic marketing. In this respect, his career is exemplary in showing us how to approach and to create theoretical / conceptual papers that achieve significant influence. Several scholars have developed overviews, summaries, and assessments of Hunt's long catalogue of academic papers and books (see, for example, the 10 vol *Marketing*

Legends: Shelby D. Hunt, edited by *Sheth, 2011*). Gleaning from this monumental assessment of Hunt's work, and from a perusal of his vita with over 300 articles that have accumulated over 80 K citations, three main contours of his work emerge. *Fig. 1* depicts these as: 1) Resource Advantage (R-A) theory of competition; 2) Relationship Marketing and Channels of Distribution; and 3) Marketing Ethics and Sustainability. *Fig. 1* also includes examples of his most cited pieces under each theme. Taken together, Hunt's central themes constitute some of the most important foundational work in marketing theory and are all important to gaining an understanding of his achievements, which culminates in his final gift to the discipline, his 2022 article in *AMS Review*.

While the themes in *Fig. 1* are grouped for the sake of clarifying particular emphasis on Hunt's work, they are not independent. One is almost tempted to observe that the three areas are in fact all macro-marketing in scope. The interdependence of the three areas is significant. For example, *Hunt (2015)* integrates R-A theory with societal welfare (ethics). Similarly, *Morgan and Hunt (1999)* integrate R-A theory with relationship marketing by observing that relationship marketing is a source of competitive advantage. Indeed, Hunt's R-A theory has its fingerprints across most of his work. Thus, in line with *Hunt et al.'s (2022)* urging for an integrative framework, we use his R-A theory to explain both the state of the discipline as well as a lens through which to examine Hunt's great success.

In this context, *Hunt and Morgan's (1995; 1996; 1997)* seminal R-A theory gave marketing a non-economic-based theory of competition. This paper may also be employed to shed light on Hunt's approach to research. The paper argues that competition,

"...is the constant struggle for a comparative advantage in resources that will yield a marketplace position of competitive advantage and, thereby, superior financial performance. All activities that contribute to positions of competitive advantage... are procompetitive - marketing activities...[being] no exception to this rule ...[Because a] market orientation stresses the importance of using information about both customers and competitors in the formulation of strategy [it constitutes a comparative advantage] ...knowledge about one's competitors-their products, prices, and strategies...could potentially enable a firm to produce a market offering for some market segments more efficiently or effectively than one's competitors... [however] a

market orientation can produce a comparative advantage only if it is rare among competitors... If all competitors adopt a market orientation and implement it equally well, then a comparative advantage accrues to none... Is a market orientation rare? ... a market orientation is [indeed] a resource that is rare among competitors ... What other resources are distinctively marketing that might provide a comparative advantage? ... [marketing scholars] can and should work on developing the comparative advantage theory, use it as a foundation for research, promote it as superior to perfect competition..." (1995, pp. 10, 11, 13)

Hunt and Morgan's (1995) R-A theory argues that in the context of the five contextual factors: societal resources, institutions, competitors, consumers, and public policy, marketing is the firm's most important advantage-maker resource in the creation of superior market positions, which produces enhanced financial outcomes. Thus, marketing is at the center of the firm's activities (Hunt and Duhan, 2002). We revise and extend *Hunt and Morgan's (1995)* R-A theory to produce *Fig. 2a* & *Fig. 2b* in order to shed interpretive light on the bankruptcy of the discipline and a lens for Hunt's own career. *Fig. 2a* uses Hunt's R-A theory to suggest how the discipline is at a competitive disadvantage. *Fig. 2b* uses the theory to help explain Hunt's competitive advantage as a scholar and his remarkable research achievements.

Fig. 2a picks up the discussions that relates to the health of the discipline from the previous section and places it under the lens of Hunt's R-A theory. Note that aside from retaining societal resources and societal institutions from *Hunt and Morgan's (1995)* R-A theory model depiction, *Fig. 2a* replaces *competitors, consumers, and public policy*, with *other disciplines & sub-disciplines of marketing, marketing scholars, and marketing practitioners*, in order to place the discipline within its relevant context for this analysis. Box 1 of *Fig. 2a* shows marketing disciplinary resources are focused on micro rather than macro approaches to research problems, which encourages doctoral students who identify as consumer behavior, strategy, or quant, to take up a micro focus in their dissertations. This tendency is reinforced by job market publication demands and promotion and tenure pressures. How does this position the discipline? Box 2 of *Fig. 2a* suggests the discipline is at a competitive disadvantage focused as it is on well-structured, micro-focused research problems far from the type of groundbreaking, theory-based papers that

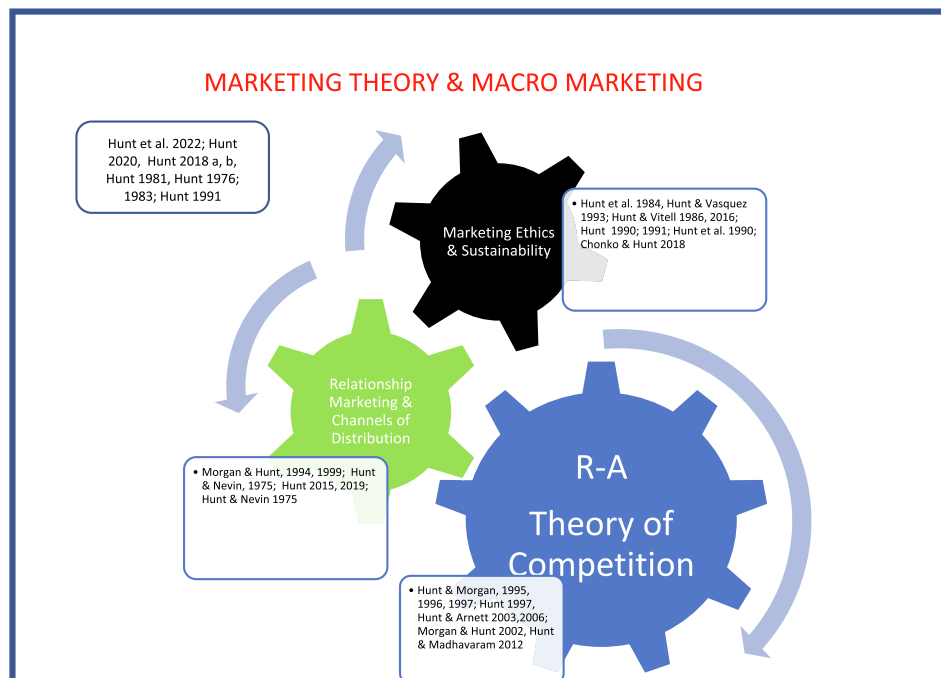


Fig. 1. Hunt's Main Contribution Themes (Areas). (See above-mentioned references for further information.)

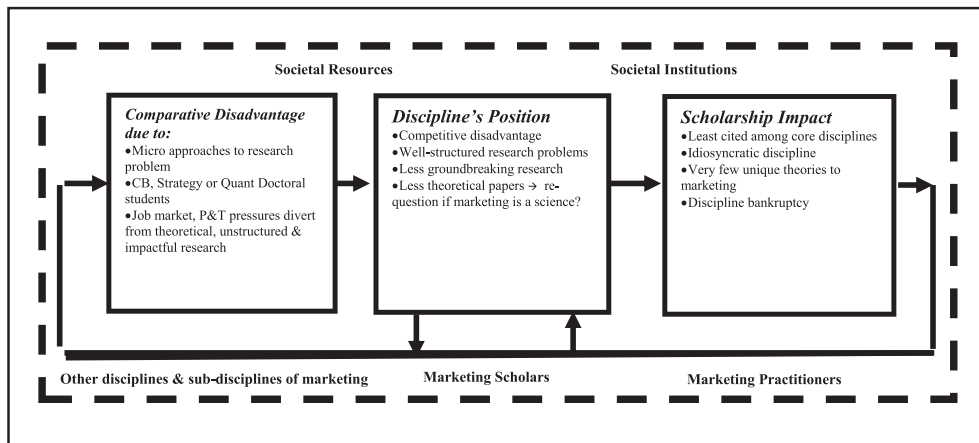


Fig. 2a. Resource Advantage Theory Applied to the Marketing Discipline.

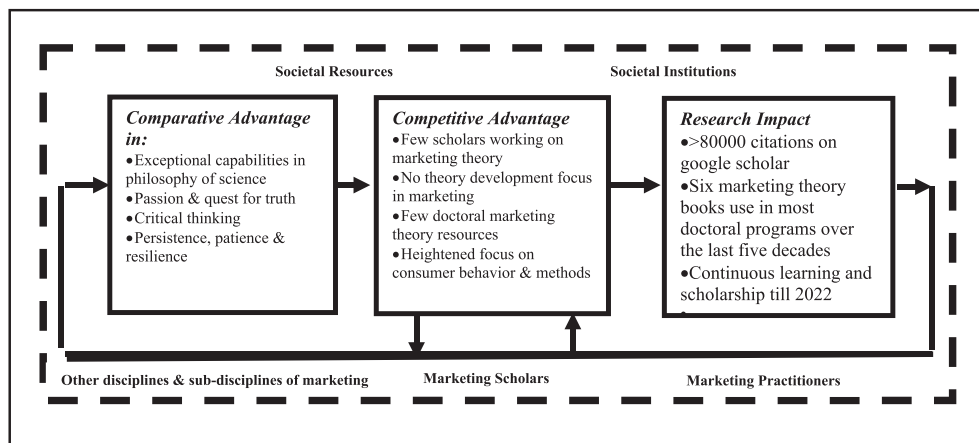


Fig. 2b. Resource Advantage Theory Applied to Shelby Hunt's Career.

tend to be marketing's most influential as shown by Clark et al.'s (2014) citation analysis. The model finds its conclusion in Box 3 of Fig. 2a where, with the exception of some of its conceptual or theoretical papers, marketing remains the least influential, least cited of the core business disciplines.

Hunt's theory may also be extended to help us understand and interpret his own career—an interesting point-of-view that provides an exemplary model for doctoral students as they pursue their own future interests. To create such a model, we modify the original presentation of Hunt and Morgan's (1995) R-A theory to produce Fig. 2b. Note that similar to Fig. 2a, aside from retaining the societal resources and societal institutions of Hunt and Morgan's (1995) R-A theory model depiction, Fig. 2b also replaces *competitors, consumers, and public policy*, with *other disciplines & other sub-disciplines of marketing, marketing scholar, and marketing practitioners*, in order to place Hunt's career within its relevant context for this analysis.

Fig. 2b provides insight into the impact and astonishing productivity of Hunt even into old age. It also suggests a recipe to point burgeoning scholars toward successful and impactful careers. Consider the *Comparative Advantage* box in Fig. 2b. Surely, one element of Hunt's impactful and productive career was his ability to take advantage of idiosyncratic opportunities and to follow up on them with hard, programmatic work to develop a unique knowledge base. In Hunt's case, this consisted of the acquisition of specialized skills in the area of philosophy of science. A serendipitous meeting with a doctoral student in philosophy opened Shelby Hunt's eyes when he was a marketing doctoral student to another way of thinking about research, theory, and

scientific reasoning. The meeting prompted Hunt to start the hard work of reading everything about philosophy of science he could get his hands on. He became one of the few in marketing at that time to master the subject. This unrepeatable opportunity gave Hunt access to a rare resource. At that time, academic marketing was still trying to come to terms with the 1959 *Gordon-Howell Report* (Ford Foundation). This report revealed marketing to be a naïve, anecdote-based, ill-defined, and poorly taught trade with a style of thinking that was out of sync with other disciplines in the academy. This culture of lax reasoning in close proximity to more sophisticated research traditions made many in marketing uncomfortable. Hunt's discovery of the philosophy of science was perfectly timed and academic marketing was ripe to benefit from Hunt's mastery.

Despite this, Hunt's venture into the philosophy of science was not sufficient to sustain him across a career of a half-century. The philosophy of science revolution he effected in marketing was fought and won by the mid-seventies. Once achieved, the subject-skills he had acquired lost their uniqueness because by that time everyone had adopted them. However, the intangible resources Hunt acquired in himself in the process of digesting the philosophy of science proved to be transferable to other topics: a passion for truth, an unusually sharp ability with logic, argumentation, persistence, patience, and resilience. Turning these skills to other areas, Hunt made notable contributions in: marketing strategy, competition, marketing management, relationship marketing, channels, macromarketing, ethics and social responsibility, consumer behavior, and marketing education.

Hunt's internalized intangible resources could be used to master any

subject and they proved to be a sustainable advantage across five decades, which enabled him to stay fully productive into his mid-80 s! It is difficult to identify another marketing academic who has been as fruitful in research for such a long time. Most startlingly, the final decade of Hunt's life was his most productive. His output can be summed up in three words: reputation; contributions; influence. An incomparable model worthy of emulation / adaptation for emerging marketing scholars.

Next, consider the *Competitive Advantage* box in Fig. 2b. Recent calls for theoretical and conceptual papers in marketing have been increasing (see Vargo & Koskela-Huotari's 2020 introduction to a special issue of *AMS Review*). This push has been a sort of counterforce against the field's myopic surge toward, "...hyper-analytical and heroically rigorous...trivialities" (Sheth & Sisodia p. 325, 2006 in Hunt p. 16, 2018, 2018c). Biggadike's (1981) prescient insight over 40 years ago, remains true:

"...many marketers today are not scientists in the theory-building sense but technological virtuosi in solving problems at a brand or, occasionally, product level... I am pessimistic in doubting that this attack will lead to theory...I am not convinced that many marketers are interested in raising their level of aggregation to the business-unit or industry-unit level and their time horizon to the long run" (p. 631).

After leaving his philosophy of science triumphs behind, Hunt turned his unequalled intellectual resources to theoretical and conceptual work. His accomplishments in this area has given us some of the most significant articles in marketing that demonstrates again and again marketing's conceptual and theoretical efforts are its most influential, both within and outside the field (Clark et al, *ibid*). Indeed, the model we are using here to analyze Hunt, his R-A theory, is one such paper. Hunt's publishing successes also gave him access to PhD students, which allowed him to multiply his already extraordinary productivity.

Moving to the *Performance* box of Fig. 2b, we consider the extraordinary results of Hunt's unique resources and market position—namely, the impact of his work. According to Google Scholar, Hunt's papers have over 85,000 cites at the time of this writing. Moreover, until the recent trend to eliminate literature-based marketing doctoral seminars in favor of methods seminars, Hunt's marketing theory textbooks were a staple in the professional formation of virtually all doctoral students. Undoubtedly, if Hunt hadn't been taken from us, he would have continued observing, analyzing, and shaping the discipline into his 90 s.

5. Conclusion & unfinished business

The authors are grateful to be able to pick up some aspects of Dr. Shelby Hunt's work and perhaps shed further light on the Era V he identified. Hunt left us with a critique of our discipline and identified core fundamental issues and suggestions for the field to revitalize itself.

Hunt expressed concerns that as the field leaves Era IV and enters Era V, other disciplines are increasingly conducting research into what has been traditionally considered marketing's domain. Ferrell (in Key et al. 2020) shows that topics that once "belonged" to marketing, such as supply chain and logistics, now have their own departments with their own specialty journals and conferences. Likewise, cutting edge research in digital topics such as dynamic pricing and customer-relevant aspects of artificial intelligence and machine learning are being developed in disciplines such as information systems (Key et al. 2020). The longer these kinds of domain poaching continue, the more normalized a lack of indigenous marketing theory will become, relegating and subsuming our discipline into non-marketing business function areas.

Hunt also was concerned about the field's fragmentation. Marketing is more than the sum of its parts. However, the degree to which it has fragmented has also undermined our shared values. Hunt spent much of his career first developing the R-A theory of competition and then promoting the usefulness of it in broad general applications in business

scholarship. He also wrote extensively on the state of marketing theory and the importance of philosophy of science to develop proper marketing theory.

It is surely healthy for the participants in an academic discipline, from time-to-time, to take stock of where it has been, where it is today, and where it needs to go. Hunt (2021) was intentional and constructive in this regard and argued that through "... time, a discipline's focal, secondary, and peripheral subject matter, as well as its norms, research methods, and schools of thought change significantly" (p. 10). Hunt saw our doctoral programs as the strategic nexus for practical change. He believed that our doctoral students would be well served to look up from their datasets to observe the broader, more sweeping, and more compelling issues marketing practitioners, the firm, and the world are grappling with. Undoubtedly, we have the resources for the renewal of a more vibrant community of research. Hunt identified important, forward-looking directions of research to help ensure a healthy and vibrant discipline decades to come. It is up to us to respond and continue the work that he started.

Dr. Shelby Hunt is responsible for foundational contributions in the discipline of Marketing. His monumental achievement of introducing the philosophy of science was foundational for moving Marketing forward as a legitimate context for scientific exploration and discovery. Likewise, he continued to contribute to areas of inquiry that serve as cornerstones of serious academic development in both style and substance. He demonstrated the importance of rigor in both theory development and empiricism / model testing. He invested in, and explored, big issues that served to mature our discipline and its practice, for example, marketing's place in society, the H-V model of ethics, the R-A theory of competition, marketing strategy, marketing management, and most recently, the future of the discipline itself (Era V). The present article takes Dr. Hunt's sincere concern for the future of the discipline very seriously. We build on his efforts through a critical view of how our discipline can restructure key elements in order to increase impact and influence. Perhaps more importantly, we offer insights and suggestions for improving our doctoral programs and producing future scholars who understand what is at the heart of our discipline, such as marketing theory, marketing strategy, and marketing management, and what it looks like for them to follow Dr. Hunt's impressive example.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Terry Clark: Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Carol Azab:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Thomas Martin Key:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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