

Guest editorial: Critiques and conflicts in service research: suggestions for redefining the marketing of goods and services as a business discipline

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Abstract

Purpose – This commentary aims to identify the myopic drift of the marketing discipline and to opine on the areas in which the leadership of service scholars is needed. The authors identify specific areas where the input of service scholars is needed to enable the discipline to better contribute to users, providers, and society. For example, the growing gap between marketing scholarship and practical business needs is acknowledged, emphasizing the unique position of service scholars to bridge this divide. While consumer well-being is crucial, the exclusive focus on behavioral science is critiqued. Marketing's roots are deeply connected to economics, shaping consumer choices, and service scholars can help revive marketing's essence.

Design/methodology/approach – Personal reflections and historical literature assessment.

Findings – The services discipline is caught in the general myopic behavioral drift of the marketing discipline. However, they are well positioned to reverse the trend by seeking leadership in PhD programs, journal editorships and review boards, faculty recruiting, hiring and promotion, and by continuing its engagement with industry professionals.

Research limitations/implications – The authors suggest extensive goals for service scholars. To accomplish these goals, it will be necessary to challenge the increasing behavioral drift of the majority of existing scholars in the discipline.

Originality/value – This work is original and controversial. It is meant to inspire discussion and focus attention on the problems inherent in the increasingly myopic behavioral orientation of the members of the discipline's academic community.

Keywords Myopic behavioral drift, Service leadership, Well-being

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

In a forthcoming commentary for a *Journal of Services Marketing* Special Issue, [Hollmann \(2023\)](#) opines as to the increasing chasm between the research of marketing scholars and practitioners' efforts to identify and implement solutions to real world marketing problems. Hollmann specifically calls for a return to greater interdisciplinary research and industry relevance and engagement. He further suggests that service scholars are ideally qualified and positioned to provide the assistance sought by industry leaders. It is a position strongly endorsed in this commentary, as it is suggested herein that the general marketing discipline's increasing inclination to ignore its traditional strategic orientation to pursue a myopic aspiration to be recognized as a behavioral science offers service scholars a unique opportunity to assume leadership. Service scholars are well positioned to assume such a role as marketing not only was founded as a distributive

science (c.f., [Bartels, 1962](#); [Tadajewski and Jones, 2016](#)), they have made notable contributions to marketing theory and practice throughout the history of the discipline. Work in areas such as the conceptualization and measurement of service quality, the effects of service value, the management of service failure and recovery, and the role of frontline service employees are notable examples. Leading service scholars are also among those who have advanced theory and practice in related areas such as customer satisfaction, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and the evolution of retail distribution. A major commonality of all the contributions of service scholars is a broad focal lens that includes the perspectives of providers and society along with consumers. Service scholars have proven themselves to be well versed in identifying and addressing issues related to the well-being of multiple party exchanges, particularly those related to interactions between providers and consumers. In fact, the contributions of service scholars to the marketing discipline have produced some of its most highly cited research ([Bolton and Drew, 1991](#); [Bitner, 1992](#); [Cronin and Taylor, 1992](#); [Parasuraman et al., 1985](#); [Vargo and Lusch, 2004](#)).

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Journal of Services Marketing
38/1 (2024) 1–12
© Emerald Publishing Limited [ISSN 0887-6045]
[DOI [10.1108/JSM-10-2023-0392](https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-10-2023-0392)]

Received 20 October 2023
Revised 26 October 2023
Accepted 31 October 2023

This call for service scholars to seek a greater leadership role in the marketing discipline is predicated on recent significant and frequent concerns voiced by leading marketing scholars that suggest marketing is in the midst of a myopic drift in an unwanted and dysfunctional direction (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Clark *et al.*, 2014; Key *et al.*, 2020; Cronin, 2022; Gaski, 2022; Hunt, 2018; Hunt, 2020; Lehmann *et al.*, 2011; Moorman *et al.*, 2019; Piercy, 2002; Reibstein *et al.*, 2019; Sheth and Sisodia, 2006; Steenkamp, 2018; Varadarajan, 2010; Webster and Lusch, 2013; Yadav, 2020). Much of this criticism is attributed to marketing scholars' pursuit of a research agenda that is leaving the discipline increasingly marginalized (Hunt, 2018). Specifically, it is suggested that the work of marketing scholars has ceded intellectual leadership within the business school as with few exceptions their research fails to make a significant contribution to the other business disciplines (Piercy, 2002). Specific evidence of this trend is provided in the biographic analysis of Clark *et al.* (2014) that based on the import and export of citations among the major journals of the four basic business disciplines (i.e. accounting, finance, management, and marketing) indicates that the work of marketing scholars is a distant fourth and the situation is getting progressively worse! The second major criticism is that the discipline's major journals are increasingly fixated on using overly sophisticated analytical explorations of trivialities (Sheth and Sisodia, 2006) that have led to a decrease in concern for topics that historically defined the marketing literature (Lehmann *et al.*, 2011). In essence, there is substantial concern that marketing scholars are exhibiting a new myopic focus on issues for which there is considerable concern as to whether they represent legitimate "marketing" issues.

The issues identified above are addressed in distinct sections in the remainder of this article. First, a brief background section is presented to frame the issues addressed. Next, the basis for suggesting there is a myopic drift is explored. In subsequent sections, the potential means to reverse the increasing myopia of the marketing discipline are offered in the form of suggestions relative to the editorial processes that determine the domain of the marketing and services literatures, the academic preparation of the discipline's scholars, potential changes needed in evaluating faculty, and the necessary pragmatic orientation of both the literature and those tasked with publishing the articles that define that literature. The desired theoretical contribution of this article is to awaken service scholars to the historical importance of service scholars and their research in the development of marketing as a business function and part of the business school. Pragmatically, the desired contribution is to encourage service scholars to recognize that the advancement of the practice of marketing and the preparation of students is an inherent responsibility of service scholars given that the discipline emerged and developed as a distributive science and that this responsibility is made more important by the current myopic drift. Next, a general description of how the discipline has arrived at this critical point in its development is considered.

Background

The importance and relevance of this new myopic focus, and the declining relevance of the discipline, is heightened because

it comes at a time when marketing scholars and practitioners face unprecedented environmental, marketplace, societal, and technological challenges (Moorman *et al.*, 2019). This concern is inherent in marketing's general lack of influence relative to the dramatic impacts of marketplace disruptions such as the growing importance of Artificial Intelligence, air and water pollution, the effects of major market disruptions such as the recent pandemic, severe weather events, natural disasters such as wildfires and earthquakes, and new social justice concerns, as well as the increasing dominance of online options for acquiring goods and services. Issues such as those related to the supply chain disruptions and consumer sourcing issues that are increasingly prominent as a result of the marketplace disruptions just identified are adding to the problem. Moreover, the marketing literature and its scholars offer little assistance as such issues are rarely, if ever, addressed in marketing's PhD programs or its literature. The discipline's inability to respond in a timely fashion to important pragmatic marketplace concerns are indicative of the discipline's declining relevance and justify the critiques and concerns noted in work of the authors who suggest marketing is in the midst of a dysfunctional myopic drift.

The declining academic influence of marketing, and its relevance as a business discipline, has been attributed to its scholars' efforts to seek legitimacy as a social science. Notably, this concern is blamed for the abandonment of the disciplines' historical focus on pragmatic responsibilities such as the identification of distribution, sales, and revenue generation strategies that enhance the efficacy and efficiency of marketing (Key *et al.*, 2020). Criticism of the discipline is further evident in the suggestion that the best marketing "science" is now conducted by business firms rather than academics (Key *et al.*, 2020). Simply stated, it is disappointing that marketing scholars have abandoned so called practical issues rather than embrace the professional model of colleagues in law and medicine. Specifically, faculty in law schools are expected to contribute first-rate scholarship and their work is often cited in trials. Similarly, faculty in medicine conduct life-saving research that directly informs practicing doctors and their patients (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005). In each case, a service oriented discipline asks its scholars to provide scholarship that produces a direct benefit to its users. In contrast, the marketing discipline unfortunately appears increasingly fixated solely on consumer well-being. Additional concern is evident in the suggestion that the conceptualization of marketing as a behavioral science is occurring at a time when there is general criticism of the social sciences as an academic discipline (Key *et al.*, 2020). For a discipline housed in the business school, these seems to represent notable criticisms.

Befitting a Special Issue entitled *Critiques, Conflicts, and Conceptualizations in Service Research*, the two primary objectives of this paper are first to address these criticisms head-on and opine relative to their validity and then offer possible course corrections for the discipline. The second is to identify the leadership opportunities available to service scholars and to motivate their participation in efforts to maintain marketing as a mainstream functional business discipline. The intent is openly to inspire debate as conflicts and critiques are never solved by silence. The point of view taken is historical and based on literature that is both critical of what is described as a

myopic drift of the marketing discipline, supportive of the efforts of services scholars, and reflective of personal observations accumulated since the latter half of the 1970s.

Marketing myopia: the services roots of marketing's theoretical base

It was suggested more than a decade ago that marketing scholars overreacted to Levitt's (1960) initial charge that marketing theory was myopic in that it erred in defining business narrowly in terms of products (Smith *et al.*, 2010). In response, an updated (i.e. new) marketing perspective was identified that corrected marketers' failure to recognize its broad societal context. Specifically, it was suggested marketing had erred in (1) its single minded focus on the customer, (2) an overly narrow definition of customers and their needs, and (3) the failure to recognize that the societal context of business required addressing the needs of multiple stakeholders (Smith *et al.*, 2010).

This second-generation marketing perspective attempted to correct Leavitt's overemphasis on the consumer as a focus of marketing efforts. Rather than suggesting marketers were overfixated on the product perspective as advanced originally by Levitt (1958, 1960), the new perspective was that firms were deeply embedded in society and thus marketing theory should adopt a broad stakeholder orientation recognizing the need for marketers to address the needs of entities such as activism scientists, politicians, and the local community (c.f., Smith *et al.*, 2010; Spar and LaMure, 2003; Yaziji, 2004). While the suggestions made for marketing theory included a call for marketing strategy that accounted for multiple exchange participants, this new perspective's focus was clearly on social needs (i.e. societal "well-being"). The fact that the needs of consumers, society, and providers (i.e. businesses) were identified, even with the admonition that societal needs (i.e. societal "well-being") deserve greater attention in marketing theory, was seen as correcting the prevailing myopic focus on the consumer (i.e. user). By pointing out that marketplace exchanges involve multiple parties, all of whom are seeking to satisfy their well-being needs, the revised perspective offered a more realistic and accurate portrayal of the tasks facing marketers. Unfortunately, it is a perspective widely ignored by marketing scholars (i.e. Smith *et al.*, 2010 cited by only 264 as of August 16, 2023).

For service marketers, it is noteworthy that the revised perspective recognizes the provider as an equal partner in market exchange. Levitt's (1960) earlier depiction of marketing as myopic in its over fixation on the product as the means to implement marketing strategies led to an equally dysfunctional focus on consumer needs and wants that did not permeate the service literature to the extent it did in the broader marketing discipline. For service providers, the typical exchange involves a consumer with a need for a non-inventorial service. In essence, service exchanges have been conceptualized as including a user (i.e. consumer) with a need or want they seek to fulfill and a provider (i.e. the service firm) that must determine how best to employ its resources to satisfy that need/want. The user may have an idea of the perceived need or want; that is, what they want a haircut to look like, the preferred appearance of a remodeled room, the outcome of a medical procedure, or the

benefit of an investment counselor. But, they seldom have any idea as to how to arrive at the preferred outcome. Thus, the service provider is in the unique position of being the key decision maker in the process that enables all parties to arrive at a preferred outcome. In contrast, when deciding which physical good best satisfies a need or want, the user (i.e. consumer) is the sole decision-maker. Thus, recognition of the multi-party nature of marketplace exchange is an important and traditional theoretical lens for service scholars, as it has been in the marketing literature since the discipline emerged from political economists' rejection of the foundational tenants of neo-classical economics in the early 1900s.

Unfortunately, the consumer focused myopia inherent in the current work of marketing scholars remain unaffected by the suggestions inherent in Smith *et al.* (2010). One limitation of this revised conceptualization of marketing is that while societal well-being is a legitimate concern for all users and providers, the focus attributed to this exchange outcome seems to receive extraordinary attention in Smith *et al.* (2010). It might be suggested that their effort is also somewhat myopic in this emphasis. Nevertheless, Smith *et al.* (2010) make an important contribution in that they recognize that exchanges are evaluated based on the well-being produced for multiple partners; specifically, users, providers, and society. The leadership opportunity this presents for service scholars is that because of the nature of service exchanges earlier described, the work of service scholars has and continues to recognize the triadic nature of marketplace exchange (see Figure 1). This presents a unique opportunity for scholarly leadership for service researchers. Next, the current myopic nature of the marketing literature identified by the numerous authors cited in the Introduction of this paper is further considered. Next, the general nature of the myopia that encompasses marketing theory is discussed.

Myopia in the marketing literatures: the role of service scholars

Simply put, it is not clear that much of the work scholars publish in marketing journals today addresses a "marketing issue" let alone contributes to the business discipline or the pragmatic concerns of the firms to whom business schools are increasingly dependent on for financial support (e.g. endowed professorships, research chairs, research funds, named colleges and departments), not to mention student employment. How else can one label research recently published in top marketing journals that focuses on the effects of dogs and cats on consumer mindsets (Jia *et al.*, 2022), of coffee consumption on consumer spending (Biswas *et al.*, 2022), not to mention the impact of artificial emotions and love on sex doll service workers (Belk, 2022)?

It is further suggested that the influence of marketing practitioners is in decline. Specifically, five of the ten largest advertising agencies are now associated with accounting or information technology companies (Ad Age, 2018; Handley, 2019; Key *et al.*, 2020). Increasingly, the position of chief marketing officer (CMO) is trending toward elimination as it is suggested that while there is a reluctant recognition of the need for marketing there is little in the way of admiration for the intellect, skills, creativity, or strategic thinking of marketers

(Key *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, it is reported that fewer than three percent of the board members of the 1,500 Standard & Poor's firms have a marketing background (Whitler *et al.*, 2018).

For these reasons and others it is roundly suggested that the influence of marketing as a business function, in addition to its scholarly impact, is in decline (Verhoef and Leeflang, 2009; Reibstein *et al.*, 2019; Fournaise Marketing Group, 2011; Nath and Mahajan, 2011; Webster and Lusch, 2013; Clark *et al.*, 2014; Homburg *et al.*, 2015; Key *et al.*, 2020). Although a thorough discussion of the cause of marketing's decline is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth mentioning that the decline seems not as precipitous relative to services. Why? The most obvious explanation is that it is clearly suggested that the declining influence of marketing is attributable to the discipline's efforts to seek legitimacy as a social science while separating it from its historical ties to such strategic topics as distribution, sales, and revenue generation (Key *et al.*, 2020). Fortunately, the allure of the social sciences does not appear to have infused service scholarship to the same extent, though the transformative movement is beginning to make inroads.

The efforts made to define marketing as a social science come at an odd time. Specifically, the efforts of marketing scholars to position the discipline as a behavioral science come at a time when the social sciences are highly criticized. The diminishing creditability of academic social sciences is well-documented. Specifically, their failure to replicate key empirical findings has given rise to strong criticism of the validity of social sciences' academic research (Open Science Collaboration, 2015; Key *et al.*, 2020). Thus, it should not be surprising that efforts to position marketing as a behavioral science are posited to have contributed to its marginalization and declining influence (Key *et al.*, 2020) and the discipline's poor showing relative to its contributions to the academic mission of business schools (Clark *et al.*, 2014). In contrast, services research to date has exhibited a strong strategic orientation and has generally resisted the behavioral focus that has engulfed the marketing literature. However, service researchers need to proceed slowly relative to an overemphasis on users (i.e. consumers), especially given the aforementioned distinction between service and physical good-focused exchanges.

A slow, imperceptible, unguided, movement in unwanted, increasingly narrow, and dysfunctional direction is said to describe the current direction of the marketing discipline (Key, 2020). It is suggested that this drift has resulted in the contraction of the discipline's topical expertise, the loss of traditional domains to other business disciplines, and increasingly less managerially relevant research. The declining relevance of the marketing discipline within business schools is also a byproduct of this myopic drift toward defining marketing as a behavioral science. To date, the services discipline is largely viewed as a sub-discipline within marketing. However, given the admonition that all exchanges are service exchanges (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), service scholars are well positioned as mainstream marketers and their work represents a stark contrast to the increasingly myopic behavioral direction of the general marketing literature. A focus on such topics as supply chain and staffing shortages, sustainable services, older consumers' uptake of digital technologies, digital financial services, pursuit of personal and spiritual awareness, participation in virtual communities, networks and worlds, affinity for peer-to-peer commerce, transformative places, seeking self-love

services, and social distance concerns (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2022) positions service scholars well within the traditional strategic orientation of the discipline and one likely to coincide with the interests of other business disciplines and the needs of practitioners. It is instructive to note that not one of these topics suggests an investigation of how the unidentifiable psychological characteristics of individuals drives their behavior. Rather in each case the focus is appropriately on the identification of the provider strategies that best serve the well-being needs of providers, users, and society. It is this orientation that is the traditional focus of marketing literature and service scholars are the best hope at recapturing the dominant position of the discipline within business schools and the workplace. Next, the historical roots of marketing are briefly considered.

A brief historical perspective: Marketing's theoretical perspective

The first myth to be debunked is that marketing emerged from neo-classical economics. In fact, if one discounts the philosophical debates of Plato and Aristotle as to the role of the agora (i.e. the "market"), the first marketing classes were offered by professors who revolted against neo-classical economics. Largely as a result of studies in Germany with professors trained in the German Historical School of Economics (GHSE) tradition, scholars such as Richard Ely at Wisconsin developed Distribution classes in the early 1900s that reflected their rejection of the notion that production (i.e. supply) informed demand (i.e. consumption). These early classes were taught in departments typically labelled Political Economics, and defined marketing as a political-economic process that served as a key vehicle in the ordering of society, recognized consumer needs as a determinant of supply (i.e. production), and reaffirmed the capitalistic economic relationship between producers and consumers (Jones and Tadjewski, 2018, p. 3). It is this perspective that is recognized in the triadic depiction of marketing, including services marketing (Cronin, 2022; see Figure 1).

Whereas a multi-party focus informed service and marketing scholars that to successfully make contributions to the well-being of consumers required some level of concern with the well-being of society, and that of the relevant goods or service provider (Smith *et al.*, 2010), the triadic conceptualization of exchange identified by Cronin (2022) explicitly identifies successful exchange as providing well-being to all participants; namely, providers, users, and society (see Figure 1). Interestingly, this triadic perspective closely adheres to the suggestions of GHSE trained marketing scholars who introduced marketing to academia in the early 1900s. While the primary concern of these early marketing-oriented scholars was on the distribution of products (i.e. goods and services) across markets in a manner that met the needs of consumers, there was also concern that marketing benefited society (e.g. promote product safety, increase standard of living). Moreover, the well-being of providers (e.g. manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers) was also considered an important facet of successful exchange and government (i.e. federal, state, and local) was assigned the role of arbitrator and the ultimate referee as to what constituted "well-being" (Jones and Tadjewski, 2018 for an expansive historical review).

Interestingly, the pioneering marketing scholars were primarily concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of services; specifically, distribution, financing, and retailing. Whether they advocated a commodity, functional, or institutional approach to conceptualizing the role of marketing, these early scholars focused on identifying ways to improve the role of service in enhancing the well-being of users, providers, and society (Jones and Tadajewski, 2018; Tadajewski and Jones, 2016). Services today are ubiquitous and the basis for value creating strategies across industries, retail types, and cultures. Service scholars focused on identifying the most effective value creating (i.e. well-being) strategies for the users, providers, and societies (e.g. cultures) involved in exchange generally, or in a specific exchange type, are embracing the work not only of the discipline's early pioneers, but that of scholars throughout the history of marketing until the recent (i.e. post 2000) myopic preoccupation with the effect of unobservable consumer psychological characteristics on behavioral responses. Frequently these behavioral responses are not even to marketing initiatives. Even more recently, TCR has initiated investigations of how to motivate the consumption of products deemed to enhance the physical "well-being" of users that harkens back to the highly criticized efforts of motivational research efforts in the 1940s and 1950s (Fullerton, 2013). In contrast, service scholars' focus reflects the traditional triadic view of exchange and is thus well positioned to lead the efforts of marketing scholars intent on reestablishing marketing's role as a dominant academic business function as opposed to redefining the discipline as a behavioral science. Next, the current myopic drift of the marketing literature is further explored.

The current myopic drift

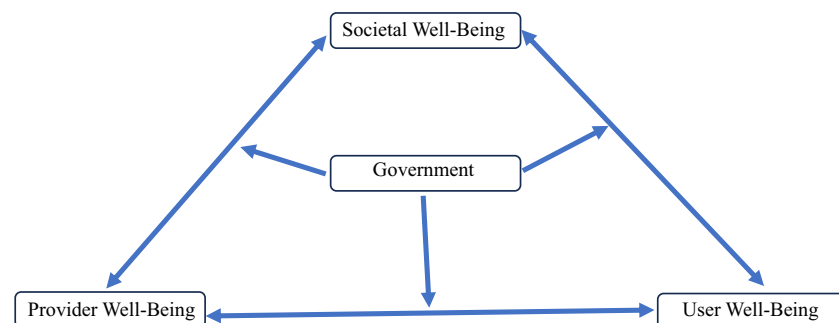
Perhaps the best depiction of the increasing disfunction of the work of marketing scholars is inherent in Gaski's (2022) three major concerns that led him to suggest that there is a growing myopia within marketing literature. First, he questions the suggestion that marketers' primary, if not sole, purpose is to ensure the well-being of consumers. Second, the appropriateness of suggesting that the flow of market information should be from marketers to consumers as opposed to from consumers to marketers is questioned. Third, Gaski contends that suggesting marketers should determine what best serves the well-being of consumers is inappropriate for multiple reasons. First, he suggests marketers lack the training and expertise needed to

assess well-being. Second, Gaski opines that allowing marketers who are not democratically elected by or directly accountable to consumers to determine what is in their best interest (i.e. "well-being") conflicts with the tenants of social democracy. Third, he indicates that existing legal and regulatory options are available when parties feel their well-being needs are not appropriately addressed and if needed can be adapted by society through democratically elected representatives and designated regulators (Gaski, 2022). While Gaski explicitly targets social responsibility in his discussion, his criticisms mimic the problems inherent in the growing fascination with transformative consumer research.

The American Marketing Association in 2017 defined marketing as the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (AMA Website, 2023). This definition justifies the exchange conceptualization depicted in Figure 1 as users (i.e. consumers), providers (i.e. clients/partners), and society are all identified. In contrast, the Association for Consumer Research (ACR) defined transformative consumer research as academic, theory-based research that examines individual and group-level problems and opportunities related to consumption, with the goal of improving consumer well-being (Mick, 2006). Transformative service research defines its research as aimed at creating uplifting changes and improvements in the well-being of individual (consumers and employees) communities and ecosystems (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2022). Earlier, social marketing was defined as the adoption of commercial promotional technologies into programs that are intended to influence the response of target audiences to improve both individuals' well-being and the well-being of the community in which they belong (Dann, 2008).

The myopia represented in these definitions is clear. Whereas the AMA definition clearly depicts marketing as an exchange process, the others fail to establish exchange as the basis of marketing. In addition, the AMA definition explicitly recognizes the need for exchange to address the well-being of multiple parties; specifically, that of users, providers, and society. The TCR and Social Marketing definition/description clearly establish the well-being of users (i.e. consumers and their respective communities) as the sole focus of their concern. In fact, it is difficult to view TCR as more than a re-introduction of social marketing. The TSR definition suggests a concern for the well-being of individual consumers and employees,

Figure 1 Conceptualization of socially responsibility exchange



Source: Cronin, AMS Review 2022

communities, and ecosystems. While communities and ecosystems were left undefined, one might be able to interpret these as including providers and society. This suggests that TSR research has the broader theoretical framework suggested by traditional marketing theory, and reflected in Figure 1, needed to accurately inform service theory and practice. The caution that must be added is that TSR hopefully avoids the narrow focus on consumer well-being that essentially embeds an unrealistic portrayal of exchange in TCR's approach to theory.

The myopic influence an exclusively consumer well-being perspective imposes on marketing scholarship and practice cannot be understated. Since its introduction by GHSE-trained scholars in the early 1900s, marketing research has endeavored to view marketing from a systems perspective. That system enabled scholars to evaluate exchange from the perspective of users, providers, and society and endeavored to identify the marketing strategies that contribute the most to the well-being of all three exchange participants. Today, an overwhelming number of marketing scholars, and all who have adopted a transformative perspective, reject exchange as a basis of marketing activity. This produces a myopic view of the marketing function that is rendering its research largely uninteresting to other business scholars and practitioners. TCR proponents also appear oblivious to the fact that the early GHSE trained economists placed great emphasis on the contributions of marketing to society. Societal well-being is inherent in early scholarly writings of marketing academics, although this literature is likely to escape contemporary behaviorists as the focus of the articles was on issues related to the distribution of goods and services.

To put this in perspective, a younger faculty member suggested at an AMA panel session on services research that marketing researchers need to forget about helping providers understand how to make profits and concentrate on motivating consumers to acquire products that maximized their well-being. Is this hyperbole or is it evidence of the myopic nature of the efforts of many current marketing scholars? A simple example suggests the shortsightedness of the suggestion of the faculty member. If a provider does not satisfy their organizational well-being goals (e.g. revenue, profits), the resultant action is either to drop the product or abandon the market. Ultimately, if provider goals are not met, the organization fails to survive. How do any of these outcomes serve the well-being of users or society? If the well-being of users is a goal, the well-being of the provider, as well as society, needs to be a concurrent goal.

The implication of the above discussion is that if a scholar's interest lies solely in the behavior of individuals or groups there are existing behavioral science disciplines (e.g. psychology, social psychology, and sociology) that accommodate such interests. Marketing is a business discipline that is housed in the business school, provides classes that prepare students for careers in business, and look to business organizations for funding. A singular focus on consumers is not business scholarship. This is not to say that the well-being of consumers is not important. It is. But as explicitly and dramatically suggested by Gaski (2022), who anointed marketers with the judgment needed to define and evaluate consumer well-being? Moreover, the notion that marketers should initiate and control the flow of information as to what contributes to the well-being of users is anti-thematic to even the most progressive marketing scholars!

The next step in addressing the increasing myopia of marketing scholarship is to identify a conceptualization to address the problem that highlights the important role of service scholars. That process starts with PhD programs, then moves to the role of journal editors and reviewers. An additional consideration is the recruiting of faculty and the standards for promotion and tenure. That discussion begins in the next section.

PhD programs: what happened?

What happened to three-year PhD programs, applicants with industry experience, and actually teaching marketing in marketing PhD programs? After motivational psychologists' failed venture as advertising professors in the 1940s and 1950s, faculty with a behavioral background were brought into marketing after among others; Wroe Alderson (1952) suggested psychology offered marketing a means to a better understanding of the effects of consumer decision making on marketing strategy. After not being envisioned as having a major role in the discipline, behavioral trained faculty came into prominence when enough traditionally educated marketing (i.e. economics dominant) professors were not available from marketing PhD programs to keep up with the demand for professors after the number of MBA and undergraduate marketing majors increased dramatically beginning in the 1970s.

Over time behaviorally trained faculty began to outnumber traditional strategic oriented faculty, and by the dawn of the 21st century PhD programs began to take on a decidedly behavioral flavor. The history of marketing, marketing management, marketing strategy, and services marketing seminars were replaced by additional consumer behavior and quantitative classes. Experimental design studies that utilized student subjects replaced secondary data and survey based dissertations. Somehow conventional wisdom began to move in the direction of five-year or longer PhD programs, as are common in the behavioral sciences where students often enter directly from undergraduate programs. That eliminated the 30-something applicant with 10 years of business experience as they were not willing to give up five years of income for a PhD stipend. It really was a redoubtable decision as the 30-somethings typically had an MBA, or a related graduate degree, and were organized enough to complete a dissertation in a year after two years of classes.

Now a typical marketing PhD student is a 22-year-old recent graduate, (typically not in marketing, who has never had anything other than a summer job. They do not have an MBA and after two years of behavioral-oriented PhD seminars spend three years working as a research assistant for professors who convince them that they need to publish multiple "A" journal articles to get the job the professor envisions for them, all the while racking up publications with their professor. This has not been a good trade-off and a three year PhD program for those who have an MBA or significant work experience are needed.

In addition, the fascination with quantitative methods is astounding. No matter how many experiments one runs, there will never be evidence of external validity (Calder *et al.*, 1982; Lynch, 1982, 1983). The over quantization of marketing research needs to be abandoned. The simple fact is that the *scientific model* such quantitative methods support are founded on the faulty assumption that business is a science-based discipline like chemistry, geology, or other hard sciences when in fact business is

a professional discipline like law or medicine (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005). Simply put, the data do not justify the methods utilized. Moreover, the decisions that drive exchange rarely justify the quantitative machinations used to analyze them. As suggested by a wise academic decades ago, marketing's quantitative methods are akin to going hunting for mosquitoes with an elephant gun the data do not match the tools! It is suggested that "When applied to business, where judgements are made with messy, incomplete data, statistical and methodological wizardry can blind rather than illuminate" (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005, pp. 5–6). Moreover, the most cited marketing articles, and those that typically win awards, tend to be conceptual. Teaching PhD students the theory development and writing skills needed to author conceptual articles would be a vast improvement over classes promoting the latest "hot" analytical technique.

Student labs are another issue. First, anyone who thinks students are good subjects (barring a few topics directly relevant to college students) is misinformed at best. Second, experiments work great in the context of pure sciences where all confounds can be controlled. It is why there is a space lab no atmosphere and no gravity to distort results. Attributing causality to experimental results suggests you have controlled all the competing explanations. That is impossible with human subjects and even more so with college students whose participation is incentivized with class credit. Moreover, such experiments create results that are at arm's length from actual practice and fail to accurately reflect the way business truly works in the marketplace (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005). Today, businesses have voluminous amounts of information, much of it in the form of time series data. Even older professors know that time series data is a superior means to establish causality. The problems attributable to the behavioral-based methodological training that dominates marketing PhD programs is fodder for a lengthy article, if not a book, but it is an area in serious need of reconsideration. Today's marketing myopia is fed by the myopic dependence on consumer experiments that permeates marketing PhD programs.

So what is the role of service scholars? To start, while it is widely acknowledged that developed economies are service dominant, few PhD programs offer PhD level service seminars and if they do they are thinly masked consumer behavior classes. A service strategy seminar that adopts a strategic approach needs to be a foundational PhD seminar. In addition, a greater number of PhD students need to be encouraged to undertake service dissertations. This research could utilize the voluminous data accumulated by service providers, hopefully with funding provided to encourage such research. It is important that service scholars take a prominent role in marketing PhD programs as this is where the next generation of the discipline's scholars identify and develop their research and teaching interests. It is also an area where a service journal can lend assistance as competitive sessions at conference for dissertation research where award winners were fast tracked into journals could assist in spurring greater numbers of emerging service scholars. Next, the role of journal editors and reviewers in addressing the growing myopic focus of the marketing discipline is further discussed.

Role of journal editors and reviewers

In addition to assuming a greater role in the leadership of marketing PhD programs, the input of service scholars is

needed as journal editors, associate editors, special issue editors, and on editorial review boards. Service in these roles is an underappreciated but important responsibility because of the impact these individuals have on the research that gets published. It is first of all an honor to be selected as a journal editor. Huge credit should go to those who take on this responsibility. Unfortunately, the selection of journal editors is defined by a process typically delegated to a small number of individuals appointed by the leadership of marketing's professional associations (i.e. AMA and AMS) or by journal publishers. It is safe to suggest that few marketing professors, and even fewer practitioners, have any idea of who actually selects journal editors. Given that these individuals have unique power in determining the direction of the discipline's scholarly research, service scholars are needed to provide leadership in correcting the myopic drift of the marketing discipline.

There is an old sports adage that the best players make the worst coaches, the explanation being that the game comes easy to them, and a great athlete cannot transfer their abilities through coaching. However, as it pertains to marketing journals, this adage does not appear to hold. In general, when a well published scholar serves as editor of a major marketing journal, the quality of articles published seems to improve. Conversely, editors with a less distinguished publishing history seem to publish mediocre papers. Likewise, when behavioral trained scholars serve as the editors of major marketing journals, those journals tend to abandon the traditional domain of marketing's theoretical base to the advantage of scholars focused on furthering marketing's slide into a myopic preoccupation with consumer well-being at the expense the noted triadic focus of exchange.

Simply put, editors and editorial review boards (ERB) need to be carefully chosen and service scholars have the requisite skills and broad theoretical foundation to lead the work of marketing scholars away from the narrow consumer well-being focus of behavioral trained academics. It is worth noting that while it is widely accepted that developed economies are largely service-based, service scholars are not well represented as editors of major journals. Editors and on the ERBs define the content and quality of marketing's scholarly work. Preference needs to be given to well cited service scholars who are generalists and neither behavioral nor quantitative specialists. There are plenty of behavioral and quantitative journals available to serve as outlets for the work of such scholars. Any journal that purports to be a general marketing journal needs to ensure that its editor and ERB respects the historic tradition of marketing as a business, as opposed to a behavioral, discipline.

An important aspect of the process of selecting editors and ERB members is the discipline's professional associations. Historically, the major professional marketing associations had nearly equal numbers of academic and practitioner members. This was reflected not only in their membership, but also in who attended their conferences. Today, the latter have disappeared from all save possibly the Frontiers in Service Conference. The fact that articles have been published on the role of caffeine, dogs and cats, and sex toys in major marketing and services journals suggest the needs of marketing practitioners are not top of mind. This not only limits the influence of marketing in the business school, it also virtually eliminates any chance that marketing's scholarly research is taken seriously in the C-suite. Service scholars are well

positioned to reverse this myopic drift as knowledge relative to needed services carries greater value by the accounting, finance, management, and technologically trained executives found in today's C-suites than the psychological profile of consumers. Next, the importance of recruiting faculty that understand the mission of contemporary business schools is explored.

Recruiting faculty

Marketing departments approach the recruitment of marketing faculty differently. The three major approaches are (1) top-down selection where administrators (e.g. department chairs, deans, and provosts) exercise substantial influence, (2) recruiting committees where elected or appointed faculty select candidates and recommend who is hired, and (3) by the vote of all tenure track faculty. It seems that the first option has gained prominence in recent years even though election (i.e. by faculty voted committees or by full faculty vote) has traditionally been the preferred approach. No matter the approach, marketing faculty need to recognize and appreciate that their appointment is to a business school or college. The failure of marketing faculty to recognize their responsibility to train future business leaders, as well as to disseminate research that advances business practice, is not only a significant driver of the increasing myopic drift of the discipline but also a barrier to student employment.

In order to fulfill the role of the business school as a knowledge communication and learning laboratory for both its students and the business community, administrators have long promoted cross-departmental research interactions. Unfortunately, such encouragement has largely fallen on deaf ears in marketing departments as its scholars increasingly seem focused on the desire for recognition of the discipline as a behavioral science. Thus, only a small portion of marketing faculty have research interests that complement those of the accounting and finance faculty who currently tend to be recognized as the strength of business schools/colleges.

In recruiting faculty, marketing departments need to assess the needs of their department, students, and the school or college in which they reside. First, marketing faculty have a responsibility to transfer knowledge. Publications are one outlet for this responsibility. The other is teaching. Typically, there is one consumer behavior class offered at the undergraduate and master's levels). There are marketing principles, marketing strategy, marketing management, retailing, services marketing, advertising, and other classes to staff. Locally, there may be a need for classes in health care or sports and entertainment marketing, or other specialty topics that meet the needs of students and potential employers. Hiring research faculty with little marketing training, and limited or no work experience, has resulted in departments where faculty are hired who only have PhD classes to teach.

Marketing departments also seem to be experiencing an avalanche of new faculty who expect a one-one teaching load. The senior author of this paper has taught two classes every quarter or semester since the fall of 1981, except for summers the last ten years or so, and has the most cites of his research among non-retired faculty in his business school nearly doubling the number of the faculty member with the second most, who not surprisingly was his PhD student. In fact, that senior faculty

member also taught two classes every quarter while in his PhD program! Teaching two classes obviously does not impede faculty from achieving success in publishing. It also meets one of the seemingly forgotten responsibilities of marketing faculty; specifically, preparing students for careers in business. Perhaps that should not be a surprise as marketing faculty increasingly recruit and then train PhD students with no work experience. Is it surprising that faculty who have never pursued a career in business do not aspire to teach courses to prepare students to pursue the career opportunities they rejected as an option? The option is straightforward. Hire faculty who have worked in a managerial position and who want to teach.

In contrast, service scholars routinely teach content classes and rarely seek out reduced teaching loads. Their leadership is needed in the hiring process. Even R-1 business schools have teaching responsibilities. The fact is teaching makes one a better researcher simply because it forces the researcher to explain his/her findings. If results do not convince students, chances are there is something defective in the research process. A department needs a diverse faculty to address both its teaching needs and to enrich its foundational research efforts. Hiring committees need to be diverse and service scholars offer the diversity of interests that is needed to ensure a department's faculty does not adopt a singular myopic focus. While hiring faculty is a critical area where the leadership of service scholars is needed, issues related to faculty evaluation are also important.

Standards for promotion and tenure, performance evaluations, and salaries

If marketing's current myopic drift is to be reversed, the "yardstick" by which faculty success is assessed also needs to be reconsidered. Currently, the standard for promotion and tenure is excellence in research and teaching although the standard for the latter seems to be "showing up" consistently and motivating students to like you. Student evaluations that qualify faculty for teaching awards, not surprisingly, are highly correlated with class GPAs. As for research excellence, any article published in a journal on a departmental list of "highly regarded" outlets, or the University of North Texas list which has unexplained acceptance as a standard, are regarded as equivalent. Ignoring the fact that some articles are more highly cited seem shortsighted. Why is a *Journal of Consumer Behavior* cited by say 60 considered a superior publication to a *Journal of Retailing* cited by more than 11,000 or even a *Journal of Business Research* cited by 1,700+? Is a *Journal of Marketing* article listed in the top twenty marketing articles cited in other non-marketing business journals superior to one not listed as frequently cited in the articles published in the top journals of other business disciplines? All these questions are currently ignored even though answers are readily available in this era of digital scholarly resources. In terms of sustained performance, is inclusion of a faculty member on something such as the Stanford 2% List that identifies the top two percent most influential scholars worldwide regardless of discipline based on the number of citations in top journals, or on Research.com's "Top Business and Management Scientists," an indication of highly rated sustained academic performance?

Answers to these questions are needed to evaluate the contributions of faculty, especially those of behaviorally

oriented faculty researchers whose articles in the major behavioral marketing journals seldom achieve a notable level of citations and are largely ignored not only in articles published in the journals of other business disciplines, but also in the behavioral science journals. If marketing wants to regain a position of prominence within the business school, or the recognition of marketing practitioners, this distinction is important. Moreover, should willingness to pursue faculty internships in industry or public service be recognized as an important input in evaluations of faculty as a means to offset the trend toward PhD programs populated by students with no work experience who have been mentored by faculty with a similar lack of practical business acumen? Such criteria have the potential to address the growing myopia of marketing scholars.

While the chance of clearly defined objective standards for promotion and tenure, performance evaluations, and salary increases are clearly limited, recognition that the mission of marketing departments can be served in multiple ways deserves recognition. Moreover, the over reliance on infrequently cited top behavioral journal publications perpetuates the existing myopia of the profession. While necessary governmental edicts related to the needs of underserved populations are certain to complicate this process, if the current myopic drift of the marketing discipline is to be reversed, the standards for promotion and tenure, performance evaluations, and salary increases need to reflect the importance of research that enhances the contributions of marketing scholars to all exchange participants and to other business disciplines. In particular, research related to the triadic conceptualization of marketplace exchanges, and the strategic interests of marketing practitioners, need to be highly valued as such efforts not only reverse the myopic drift of the discipline, they also address the needs of marketing practitioners and students.

Service scholars have specific reasons to address issues related to faculty evaluations. Foremost among them is that while some top marketing journals have been receptive to service research, service-oriented journals generally have not been afforded the same prestige as many of the second level behavioral research outlets. Thus, while service articles typically are cited with greater frequency, often papers published in secondary behavioral journals are afford greater weight in the evaluation process. Addressing this unfortunate misperception should be at the top of the critical issues addressed by service scholars.

Summarizing need to reposition marketing as business discipline

The objective of this discourse was to suggest that marketing needs to address its myopic drift toward defining the discipline as a behavioral science that is inconsistent with its historical mission and its residency in the school/college of business. This objective coincided with the desire to identify the potential opportunities that exist for service scholars to assume leadership is reversing this myopic drift. As is identified in the discussions above, service theory mirrors the traditional triadic conceptualization of exchange that has driven marketing theory since pioneering GHSE educated economists rebelled against neo-classical economic theory in establishing Political Economics Departments that embraced the notion that

consumption should inform production rather than the inverse and began offering Distribution Classes that became the basis of the marketing discipline. These early distribution classes focused on the service provided by manufacturers and agriculture producers so service scholars rightfully can claim that marketing was born as the study of service provision.

As was stated early in this article, the intent was to foment discussion. [Hollmann's \(2023\)](#) insight as to the increasing gap between the work of marketing scholars and the efforts of practitioners to find assistance in identifying the compounding array of challenges inherent in contemporary markets highlight the need to address that gap. The service discipline is well positioned to be leaders in an effort to reverse the increasingly myopic drift of the marketing discipline of which services are a part. As recognized earlier, there is no debating that consumer well-being is an important responsibility of all marketing entities. However, suggesting a sole focus on consumer well-being is naïve for the reasons identified in the article. Behavioral research has the potential to inform marketing decisions. However, suggesting that marketing is a behavioral science is also naïve. Economics arguably informs more consumer decisions than any other factor. Afterall, leading providers in the US economy such as Walmart and Amazon depend on economics to drive consumers to them. And perhaps the point most relevant to this discussion is that service scholars are in a unique position to lead the marketing discipline generally, and in addressing its myopic drift toward defining itself as a behavioral discipline specifically.

The nine conceptual articles that constitute the Special Issue entitled Critiques, Conflicts, and Conceptualizations in Service Research are examples of how service scholars are addressing the need for leadership in the marketing discipline. The contribution of each is considered in the next section.

Special issue content

In this special issue, leading service scholars offer insights into areas of future research. This section provides a brief overview of these articles.

The paper by Gleim, McCullough, Gabler and Ferrell, titled “Metaverse: Shifting the Reality of Services” delves into the transformative impact of the metaverse on services marketing. This article, after a comprehensive examination of the metaverse’s past, present, and anticipated future, presents a range of research prospects grounded in relevant theories from the services literature. The research centers on key service theories and their applicability within the metaverse. The findings highlight how the metaverse introduces a novel dimension to customer experiences, offering service researchers an avenue to advance this evolving domain. The article also scrutinizes potential limitations in existing theories, both within and beyond the realm of services, unveiling critical domains for service scholars to explore. As the metaverse continues to evolve and mold consumer interactions, the research identifies research opportunities for scholars to pursue, facilitating the development of new theories that accommodate the metaverse’s growth within the service sector. In essence, this article contributes to the understanding of how the metaverse’s technological advancements are reshaping the service

landscape, driving the need for innovative theories and future scholarly exploration.

The paper by Taylor, Beatty, and Roberto, titled “Encouraging Prolonged Consumption through Habit-Boosting Efforts: Conceptualization and Research Agenda” aims to enhance understanding of prolonged consumption journeys and their maintenance through the use of habit-boosting techniques by service providers. A thorough evaluation of existing research is used to identify a conceptual framework that combines habit and transformative consumer intervention theories with customer journey literature to explain the role of habit in supporting prolonged consumption journeys. It introduces habit-boosting strategies as tools for service providers to assist their customers in extending their consumption experiences. The study emphasizes the limitation of habit strength as an operative resource due to inadequate resource integration, which hampers customers’ ability to sustain prolonged consumption journeys. The paper identifies four distinct habit-boosting strategies that offer service providers the potential to encourage extended consumption journeys for customers. The uniqueness of this study lies in its presentation of a classification of habit-boosting strategies and a research agenda, paving the way for practical and theoretical advancements in the field.

In the article by Peter Dickson, titled “Permissibility versus Feasibility: Considering Artificial Intelligence in Service from a Consumer-determined, Co-evolutionary Perspective” investigates the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and customer-facing services, offering a perspective that centers on consumers’ influence. The aim is to guide service researchers in understanding the integration of AI from a consumer-driven, co-evolutionary angle. By critiquing existing frameworks addressing AI implementation in services, the paper advocates for an alternative approach rooted in social psychology and utilizing tools from management and evolutionary biology. A key argument is that current frameworks tend to underestimate the extent to which human job roles will co-evolve with AI, emphasizing technology feasibility over consumer permissibility. With an eye toward value-determinations rather than job titles, the paper suggests contextualizing research within fitness landscapes and proposes the “actor vs appliance” dimension as a mediator, along with services-centric variables for further exploration. Highlighting the transformative potential of AI in service exchanges, this approach draws on service marketing expertise while integrating insights from various disciplines.

In the paper by Tronvoll and Edvardsson titled “Philosophical Foundation: A Critical View on the Field of Academic Marketing and Service Research” examines the evolving landscape of academic marketing and service research, focusing on their philosophical underpinnings. It traces the historical development of these fields and explores how they expanded by integrating concepts from various disciplines. The study emphasizes the need for a solid philosophical foundation, an aspect underexplored in academic marketing literature. Highlighting the shifts brought by technological advancements and changing societal dynamics, the article advocates for a more adaptive view of markets, urging marketing to respond to emergent streams such as value co-creation, disruption, digitalization, and artificial intelligence. Drawing from critical realism and combining structuration and systemic perspectives, the article introduces a new philosophical viewpoint to address the contemporary

challenges of marketing theory. By re-examining philosophical foundations, the article aims to enrich the relevance and adaptability of academic marketing in an ever-changing world.

The article by Furrer, Landry, and Baillod titled, “Managing customer-to-customer interactions: Revisiting older models for a fresh perspective” presents an exploration into the management of customer-to-customer interactions (CCI). It aims to construct a comprehensive and theoretically grounded framework by revisiting three established services marketing models: the servuction model by [Eiglier and Langeard \(1977\)](#), the services marketing triangle by [Bitner \(1995\)](#), [Grönroos \(1996\)](#), and [Kotler \(1994\)](#), and the services marketing pyramid by [\(Parasuraman, 2000\)](#). Utilizing a problematization approach, the study critically evaluates these foundational models, questions their underlying assumptions, and crafts an alternative conceptual framework for CCI management. This newly devised four-triangle framework encompasses four modes of CCI management: through firm decisions, frontline employees, physical environment design, and technology integration. It emphasizes the intricate triadic relationships between the central customer, fellow customers, and the modes of CCI management. This effort in the services marketing realm not only contributes a novel perspective but also proposes avenues for future research, promising to shape the landscape of managing interactions in evolving service marketplaces.

In the article by Giebelhausen and Poehlman, the authors present an alternative perspective for researchers and professionals interested in the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into services, focusing on a consumer-centric approach. While critiquing existing frameworks, which primarily assess the technological feasibility of AI, the paper suggests a new framework rooted in social psychology and concepts from management and human-computer interaction. The proposed framework identifies three barriers to consumer-granted permissibility (experiential, motivational, definitional) and suggests three corresponding responses (communication, motivation, recreation) to enhance the consumer’s acceptance of AI integration. The key implication of this research is that service design should prioritize the customer experience (CX) and avoid classifying service tasks based on AI intelligence. This perspective challenges the prevailing approach advocated by Huang and Rust, which primarily focuses on predicting the rate at which AI will replace service tasks, offering a more niche perspective compared to the broader challenge of effectively incorporating AI into service offerings.

The article by Kahle and Lee, titled “Services as Emulation Marketing: Conceptualization and Concerns” introduces emulation as a crucial strategy within services marketing. Drawing upon a range of literature, including social learning theory, social adaptation, conformity, values, persuasion, and social comparison, this paper outlines mechanisms that encourage emulation throughout the consumer decision-making process. These mechanisms encompass various elements such as identity, goals, endorsements, and online communities. The study connects insights from sports, lifestyle, and services literature to provide a fresh perspective on services marketing through the lens of lifestyle emulation. The article not only pioneers this innovative approach but also explores potential research directions and associated risks,

thereby adding a unique layer to discussions on services marketing strategies.

The paper by Leino, Davey and Johns, titled “Service System Resilience Under Resource Scarcity: From Vulnerability to Balanced Centricity” addresses service context disruption by exploring consumer vulnerability and the often-overlooked susceptibility of service firms and actors to disruptive shocks. The proposed framework of balanced centricity and service system resilience aims to ensure sustainability by mitigating resource scarcity challenges. Through a conceptual modeling process, the study integrates resilience, balanced centricity, and customer vulnerability theories to define multi-actor vulnerability. The research reveals how resource constraints among actors impede integration while highlighting the potential benefits of disruptive shocks. By emphasizing interconnectedness, the framework underscores the need to examine multi-actor vulnerability’s impact on value exchange and develops research propositions for service system resilience. The paper’s contributions lie in defining multi-actor vulnerability, exploring multi-level aspects of vulnerability, and linking balanced centricity, service resilience, and multi-actor vulnerability. It prompts reconsideration of strategies for value co-creation and continuity in a dynamic service landscape, enriching our understanding of these concepts.

The paper by Vredenburg, Kapitan, and Jang, titled “Service Mega-Disruptions: A Conceptual Model and Research Agenda” introduces the concept of service mega-disruptions as significant and unforeseen environmental stressors that impede a service organization’s ability to maintain its desired level of service. Unlike conventional service failures, these disruptions are distinguished by their extensive impact and limited duration. Drawing upon service recovery theory, the paper constructs a conceptual model that juxtaposes strategies for recovering from service failures with approaches to addressing mega-disruptions, aiming to understand how consumers respond to changes in service value. The study identifies research gaps in comprehending these disruptions that are defined by their conceptualization, measurement, and effects on the service experience. Notably, the paper suggests that in cases of service mega-disruptions, consumers might naturally moderate their expectations, potentially alleviating the need for formal service recovery efforts. These shifts blame attribution from service providers to external factors, possibly altering mechanisms of customer forgiveness. Additionally, the paper posits that service mega-disruptions transform service ecosystems, leading to more rigid and contractual systems with reduced provider agency and adaptability. The study calls for further exploration of the enduring consequences of these disruptions on service providers’ control and market responsiveness, offering an innovative conceptual model and research agenda to advance the understanding of these phenomena in relation to customer engagement and the evolution of service ecosystems.

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