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# Guest editorial: Reframing marketing priorities

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This Special Issue is the outcome of the 2021 Academy of Marketing Annual Conference. For the first time in the history of the Academy of Marketing, our annual conference took the form of a virtual online event necessitated by pandemic condition at that time. As we, as a research community, negotiated our way through the challenges of that unpredictable external environment, our annual conference considered how marketing could play its part in helping to shape how we engage with economic, social, political and cultural change. Our 2021 conference theme reflected the need to refocus and address how we, as marketing academics, teachers and practitioners, can “Reframe Marketing Priorities” in response to such change.

We invited colleagues to explore the crucial issues of change, responses to change and reflection on change that help reframe marketing priorities. We proposed to achieve this through a series of workshops asking the following questions:

- Q1. What are the marketing priorities that are most impacted by current conditions?
- Q2. How do we reframe these priorities theoretically?
- Q3. How is what and how we teach impacted?
- Q4. What methodological advances and innovations help us to answer these questions?

The resulting 18 workshops, which addressed the three remits of teaching, research and reflections on society, formed the basis of our conference. The workshops were Access, Inclusion and Care in Marketing: Reflections and learnings from Covid-19; Consumer Research with Social Impact During a Pandemic: Reflections on academic identities; Consumer Spaces Post-Covid: Back to normal or new normals?; Creating and Delivering Digital, Innovative and Authentic Assessments; Democratising and Decentering Marketing Inquiry; Embedding Sustainability and Responsibility into the Marketing Curriculum; Harnessing the Power of Word-of-Mouth; Identifying the Not-for-Profit Marketing Visionaries; Innovations in Learning and Teaching for Use in Covid-19 and Beyond: Pedagogic practice reframed; Purpose Driven Brands: The rise of social sustainability; Reframing Circular Economy as a Marketing Priority: Emphasising the role of consumers; Reframing our Priorities: Understanding and tackling consumption insecurities; Searching for the New “Normal”: Sustainability in a digital age; Taking the Experiential Online: Engaging consumers virtually during Covid-19; The Power of Visual Methods in Understanding the “New Normal”; Transformative and Critical Marketing Pedagogies; Weaving Connections: Advancing theoretical insights into gift giving in the 2020s; Wellbeing within Service Ecosystems. All papers presented at these workshops were eligible to submit to this special issue. The resulting eight papers we present in this volume were those successful in the review process.

Brand communities are central to the work presented in our first two papers by Dineva and Daunt, and Mitchell. Dineva and Daunt are concerned with “Reframing online brand community management: consumer conflicts, their consequences and moderation”. Using a rigorous, three stage sequential exploratory approach, they investigate the different consumer-to-consumer (C2C) conflicts in online brand communities. They then measure the direct impact of these conflicts on observing brands and consumers, before investigating



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their moderation. In so doing, they distinguish between three forms of C2C conflict: intra-group, inter-group and outer group, the latter being a novel contribution of the work. Their research highlights important implications for marketing and brand managers in the social media space, in particular that C2C conflicts do not negatively impact brand trust. They also note, however, that brands should not be passive in the presence of C2C conflict; de-escalating action by brands is more effective than that carried out by consumers, and this ultimately has a positive impact on how consumers view the brand.

Sarah-Louise Mitchell's paper focuses on "Reframing the practice of volunteering as a collective endeavour through a focal community brand". She examines the relationship between non-profit volunteering and brand communities by using a practice-based case study exploration of parkrun, a volunteer-enabled non-profit organisation. In reframing volunteering away from the long held individual needs-based approach by taking a brand community lens, this work highlights non-profit volunteering as a focal brand community that prioritises the needs of the group, rather than the individual. The work emphasises the relevance of brand community research anchored in physical place, rather than online; the latter has tended to dominate brand community research discourse. This paper also offers important implications for non-profit volunteering practice by encouraging a redevelopment of the implicit social contract between service beneficiaries and service enablers to improve service delivery through volunteering. Best practices concerning the fluidity of volunteer engagement is also surfaced by this work.

Customer power (Abboud, Bruce and Burton) and stigma (Apostolidis, Brown and Farquhar) within the service ecosystem are the issues progressed by our next two papers. Contributing to literatures on customer power, customer engagement and customer wellbeing, Abboud *et al.* examine customers' experiences of low power in service encounters and the resultant impact on customer engagement and disengagement towards a firm. In identifying multiple drivers of low customer power, this work adds a novel perspective to the customer power literature, given the preponderance of previous studies on this issue in service contexts to focus on either high customer power or no customer power. Employing a qualitative research design using visual elicitation interviews, they find that perceptions of low power lead to negative customer engagement and disengagement. This subsequently leads to reduced customer wellbeing. A typology of disengagement behaviours resulting from low customer power is offered.

Apostolidis, Brown and Farquhar introduce the concept of stigmatised service ecosystems (SSEs), reframing existing understandings about stigma. Specifically, their work examines how the stigma associated with payday borrowing spills over beyond the user to other actors within the service ecosystem. They find that SSEs are characterised by damaging, enabling and concealment interactions, with concealment being particularly identifiable with the stigmatised service ecosystem. It is concealment which "exacerbates or diminishes those damaging and enabling interactions". While their study surfaces ill-being and value co-destruction, it also recognises wellbeing and value co-creation in an SSE. Their work makes important recommendations for practitioners and regulators in the financial services industry.

Stigma of a different kind, that of gendered ageism, is considered in the work of Gillhooley, Resnick, Woodall and Allison. Their paper examines "The self-perceived age of GenXwomen: prioritising female subjective age identity in marketing". Using online solicited diary research, they surface the lived age-related experiences of Generation X women. They identify seven frames – affective, protest, acceptance, camouflage, life-stage, inequity and inconsequence – to conceptualise the different ways age is subjectively construed by GenX women. These seven frames lead Gillhooley *et al.* to conclude these

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women experience postmodern aging present in multiple identities that mitigates against the idea of this group as a definitive segment. Each frame produces a different response to the concept of gendered ageism. A further intriguing question posed by their work is that as generational groups age they may become more fragmented; therefore, a generational cohort evolves over time. They offer actionable recommendations for practice as a result of their work.

Arts-based research is the focus of our next two papers. Deepening student engagement with marketing through the integration of material from the arts is the purpose of Heath and Tynan's paper. "We want your soul": re-imagining marketing education through the arts" explores the felt experiences of student learning using arts-based activities. Specifically they "discuss the use of learning techniques based on students creating artistic works and considering existing ones, to encourage both sensitivity to the moral issues around marketing and creative thinking regarding what the discipline's place in society could be". This reframing and re-imagining of marketing education offers a template for other scholars to draw from the arts to strengthen critical engagement of students, while offering practical advice on the benefits and challenges of such an approach.

The Consumer Research with Impact for Society (CRIS) Collective's paper "Let there be a 'We': introducing an ethics of collective academic care" also draws on arts-based research. Based on collaborative work of one of the Academy's Special Interest Groups, CRIS, this paper introduces an Ethics of Collective Academic Care. This is the outcome of a critical appraisal of collaborative working, building on the labour of the group and the development of a collaborative poem. In producing their ethics of collective academic care, they do not shy away from discussing the challenges, conflicts and tensions involved in such an endeavour. In encouraging others to adopt their approach, they also highlight the cathartic nature of such collaborative working and the opportunities for change that can arise from a more caring approach to academic life and identity.

Our final paper by Branco-Illodo, Heath and Tynan uses attachment theory to explore how gift-givers manage and characterise their gift-giving networks over time. Again, drawing on qualitative data through the use of diary entries and interviews, they propose a novel conceptualisation of gift-giving as a network, rooted in the giver's social context. Gift receivers are organised into three main categories depending on the mediated, surrogate or direct bonds they have with gift-givers. They identify gift receivers as being sporadic, dependent, transient or enduring, characteristics that can change over time depending on attachment bonds. Their work demonstrates the dynamic and complex nature of a gift-giver's network and how connected that network is with the individual's attachment needs. They offer some very insightful recommendations for marketing practitioners, advising them towards focusing more on attachment bonds rather than demographic, familial or personal relationships.

While these papers deal with diverse theoretical issues, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the rich qualitative nature of the work that is evidenced here. We did not specifically solicit qualitative work, but it is the unexpected, inspiring thread that binds these papers together. We hope this collection encourages researchers to be innovative in their methods, and embrace diverse qualitative approaches to unearth rich, thick understanding of contemporary marketing phenomena. A recent meta-analysis of almost 6,000 papers in the top four marketing journals (1990–2021) finds that "a prevalent thought style has developed in the field – defined by the research ideals of novelty, clarity, and quantification – that shapes the collective view of how marketing scholars . . . can make a valuable contribution to marketing scholarship". This collection demonstrates the alternative to quantification; as the papers in this Special Issue attest, quantification is *not*

the only way to make a valuable contribution to marketing scholarship. Maybe it is through continuing to challenge marketing's methodological orthodoxy that we can truly "reframe marketing priorities".

We are very aware that no Special Issue is complete without acknowledging the contributions of numerous individuals without whom it could not materialise. We would like to thank all contributors to the Academy of Marketing workshops during our AM2021 conference. This online event sparked tremendous discussion and debate, resulting in this excellent set of papers. We would like to thank all of the authors included here for their work which will, undoubtedly, inspire important future research agendas. We would like to thank our reviewers; their constructive reviews were fundamental to the shaping of this Special Issue. We would like to offer special thanks to the Marketing Trust for their generous sponsorship of the conference. Finally, we would like to thank our colleagues at the *European Journal of Marketing*, Greg Marshall, Debbie Keeling and Richard Whitfield, for their generous support of the Academy and this Special Issue.

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#### **Further reading**

Kindermann, B., Wentzel, D., Antons, D. and Salge, T.-O. (2023), "Conceptual contributions in marketing scholarship: patterns, mechanisms and rebalancing options", *Journal of Marketing*, doi: [10.1177/00222429231196122](https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429231196122).