Journal of Consumer Marketing

Bridging marketing's intentions and consumer perceptions

Luke Kachersky, Dawn Lerman,

Bridging marketing's intentions and consumer perceptions

Luke Kachersky and Dawn Lerman
Fordham University Schools of Business, New York, New York, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The paper's aim is to explore consumer perceptions of marketing and test the malleability of those perceptions.

Design/methodology/approach – Study 1 is exploratory in nature, and employs a free-response sentence completion to, "marketing is [...]". Study 2 employs an experimental design, testing whether the framing of communications about marketer performance (firm-oriented vs consumer-oriented) influences consumer perceptions of marketing.

Findings – Based on free responses to "marketing is [...]", findings indicate that US consumers generally see marketing as something that is bad for them, but good for businesses. However, this asymmetry disappears when marketer performance is communicated with a consumer orientation.

Practical implications – Marketers aim to create relationships with consumers based on value exchange, yet consumers do not see such value exchange. They see the value of marketing for business, but not for consumers themselves. By being more cognizant of how marketer performance is discussed, marketers can overcome such perceptions and build better relationships with consumers.

Originality/value – Other research on attitude toward marketing focuses solely on people's feelings about marketing; here we capture an extra dimension – namely, consumer perceptions of who marketing serves. Further, extant research on consumer attitudes toward marketing tend to describe their current state; this paper does the same but also tests and offers a specific solution for improving perceptions of marketing.

Keywords Consumer perceptions of marketing, Marketing communications, Definition of marketing, Framing, Value exchange

Paper type Research paper

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.

Marketing is a relatively straightforward concept: make people's lives better and get paid for doing so. Its concurrent goals – create value for people and capture value for the firm – are what distinguish it from the hard-sell, profit-first business practices of yore (Kotler, 1969; Kotler and Keller, 2011).

Yet, despite being based on a philosophy of value exchange, marketers are more apt to communicate their performance in terms of the value marketing contributes to the firm, giving shrift to communicating performance in terms of value to customers. Marketers commonly report satisfaction as a value delivery metric. Satisfaction measures assess the degree to which marketers meet their customers' expectations (Oliver, 2010). However, it is an imperfect measure of value since satisfaction levels do not speak to the degree to which a marketer makes differences in peoples' lives. A consumer could be equally satisfied with his socks and with his laptop computer, but these products likely translate to different levels of impact on a consumer's life. Others have tried to tackle this shortcoming by assessing value directly. In a seminal research synthesis and qualitative study, Zeithaml (1988) derived four definitions of consumer value. Three directly implicate consumer costs or price, while the last-value-pertains to the set of benefits consumers derive from the product. This was reflected in consumer interview responses such as, "Value is what is good for you," and "value to me is what is convenient" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 13). Having uncovered this disagreement over definition, Zeithaml predicted both conceptual and methodological difficulties in measuring consumer value. Indeed, only recently have we started hear about the ways in which marketers contribute or help improve people's lives. The Center for Positive Marketing launched V-Positive – a measure of the positive impact that marketing and specific brands have on people's lives – in summer 2011, while Havas Media announced the first results of its Meaningful Brand Index – another measure of brand value from the consumer's perspective – later that year. While both have garnered attention in popular media (cf. Clendaniel, 2011; Kachersky and Lerman, 2011), the message is far from ubiquitous. Further, even though research on consumer well-being has proliferated in recent years, it often pits consumers and marketers against each other instead of considering them partners in the same value exchange process (cf. Kucuk, 2009). Similarly, concepts such as well-being marketing (Sirgy and Lee, 2008) have been advanced as optional models for marketing, failing to recognize that the betterment of customers' lives has been the crux of marketing since its inception. This still-evolving understanding of consumer value within marketing is starkly contrasted with our nuanced understanding of the value marketing captures for the firm; the latter is micro-analyzed and widely communicated to media and stakeholders with measures such as sales conversion rates, word of mouth metrics and profit, among many others.

Given this gap between the communication of marketing's value to the firm and marketing's value to consumers, it is no surprise that marketing has its vocal critics. For example, in *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* – a book *Time*

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at **www.emeraldinsight.com/0736-3761.htm**

Journal of Consumer Marketing
30/7 (2013) 544–552

[ISSN 0736-3761]
[DOI 10.1108/JCM-06-2013-0624]

Journal of Consumer Marketing
Volume 30 · Number 7 · 2013 · 544–552

Magazine named among the Top 100 non-fiction books published since 1923 (Fastenberg, 2011) – author Naomi Klein protests against the ubiquity of brands and their role in society. In this paper, we explore whether the general population is as critical of marketing and if they see anything in marketing that is for them. Further, we test whether the framing of marketing communications – as being firm-oriented versus consumer-oriented – influences consumers' perceptions of marketing.

Different attempts have been made to answer some of these questions, with Sheth *et al.* (2006) finding generally negative attitudes toward marketing among a convenience sample of consumers, and Dalsace and Markovitch (2009) finding increasingly negative media coverage of marketing. Gaski (2008) has conducted the longitudinal Index of Consumer Sentiment toward Marketing for over 20 years, aggregating consumer satisfaction with each element of the marketing mix into an overall score, with that score turning positive – just barely – only in 2011. In this research we aim to build on those pioneering attempts, assessing not only consumers' attitudes toward marketing, but also their perceptions of who marketing is for – business and/or consumers. We find that most people view marketing as something that primarily serves business needs rather than consumers' needs. Further, when people do consider marketing in terms of its effect on consumers, they tend to view it as a nuisance. With these results in mind we test a method for marketers to augment their communications in order to make a better case for their aim of engaging in mutually beneficial value exchange, finding that a relatively simple reframing of marketer performance communications from a financial orientation to a consumer orientation helps overcome the negative bias in perceptions of marketing's impact on people.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. First we provide a brief history of marketing to establish its aims and intentions, and summarize common criticisms of marketing in order to establish the existence of a gap between the goals of marketing and marketing as it is perceived. Next, we present the details and results of an exploratory study to assess consumer perceptions of marketing. We then detail an experiment in which reframing a marketer's performance communications significantly alters consumer perceptions of marketing. We close with a discussion of theoretical and managerial implications as well as directions for future research.

Intentions and criticisms of marketing

According to the American Marketing Association (2007), "Marketing is 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." Underlying this is the philosophy that the best way for business to succeed is by satisfying customers' myriad wants and needs; that is, by delivering value. Popular thought is that this philosophy has driven marketing practice since the 1950s. However, evidence of its application can be seen as far back as Shaw's (1916) recognition of market segments and Moore's (1945) articulation of using demand to set production levels rather than the other way around – observations that occurred during what are commonly thought of as the production and sales eras (Fullerton, 1988). Sheth and Uslay (2007) brought a fully modern interpretation of marketing, highlighting that while exchange may be a limiting paradigm for marketing, value for marketers and customers alike has been and always will be a core precept of marketing, whether consumers passively derive that value (as in a movie) or co-create the value with the marketer (as with websites that rely on user-generated content, like Facebook or YouTube). In short, businesses have aimed to capture value for themselves by delivering value to customers for a long time.

Despite this history of seemingly good intentions, marketing has had a similarly long history of public distrust and criticism. Most notably starting with the publication of Vance Packard's (1957) *The Hidden Persuaders* in 1957, criticism of marketing has proliferated in the intervening decades. In 1964, the Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) started tracking the public's attitude about one particular marketing activity: advertising. At the time they found that 54 percent of survey respondents perceived advertisements as attempts to persuade them to buy items for which they had no need, while 37 percent saw advertisements as a useful source of information. Two and a half decades later, the number of ORC survey respondents who thought of advertisements as unwelcome persuasion attempts shot to 80 percent, while only 17 percent saw advertisements as a source of useful information (Goodbody, 1990). By 2003, an anti-marketing measure was being legislated by the US government. Specifically, the Federal Trade Commission created the "do not call" list, which attracted 137 million phone numbers by 2007 (Darlin, 2007). A 2006 study by Sheth *et al.* (2006) revealed that 65 percent of respondents held a negative attitude toward marketing. Finally, a 2009 content analysis of 20 years of media coverage showed that the press has increasingly discussed marketing in a negative light while decreasingly discussing it in a positive light (Dalsace and Markovitch, 2009).

How do marketers end up so ill-perceived? Star (1989) suggested that poor perceptions of marketing stem from two primary sources. The first arises when a marketer overreaches its desired market; when those outside the desired market are exposed to a marketer's communications, they become distracted, irritated or frustrated. This is in part the type of situation that gave rise to the "do not call" list. The second source of ill perception occurs when a consumer feels his or her needs are not being met by marketers, which simply leads to frustration. For example, a modern smartphone user may become frustrated when a software maker produces an application for operating systems other than the one the user personally uses. Star's framework is based largely on the idea that marketers broadcast their efforts, which facilitates these kinds of mismatches between marketers and the audiences with which they communicate. Today, however, marketers narrowcast their communications, with promotions being targeted through very niche channels within a fragmented media space while other marketing mix elements are personalized to the individual. These immense shifts over the last two decades have enabled marketers to better serve people. Do consumers see it that way? Do consumers see marketing as something good? Do consumers see marketing as something that is as inclusive of them as it is of businesses? We conducted an exploratory study to find out.

Study 1

This study aimed to explore consumer perceptions of marketing via a simple sentence completion task. Using online survey software and a sample of 1,006 US consumers drawn from a nation-wide panel, participants were asked to complete the sentence, "marketing is [...]," and to provide information about their gender, age, occupation, income and education. A total of 57 respondents failed to complete the sentence (e.g. typing in "none") and were excluded from the analysis. The responding sample was nearly evenly split between genders (50.5 percent female) and the median age was 47. For comparison, the US Census reported in 2010 that the population was 50.8 percent female and the median age was over 37 years, the latter being part of a trend of an aging population (US Census Bureau, 2010). While our final sample skewed older, our data was also collected at least one year after the last census so it may, at least in small part, reflect the advancement of that trend. Two-thirds of the sample reported an annual income of at least $25,000, while the US Census reported about 75 percent of the actual population in the same category (US Census Bureau, 2012a). About half of our sample received at least a 2-year college degree, while the US Census reported about 56 percent of the population completed at least some college or more (US Census Bureau, 2012b).

Two themes emerged in the responses to the "marketing is [...]" sentence completion item. First, participants responded from varying perspectives. Some took on the perspective of industry and the economy, making statements like, "(marketing is) an invaluable tool for sales growth and company longevity," while others spoke from their individual perspective as consumers or for consumers in general with statements like, "(marketing is) a way to con me into buying stuff I do not need;" a third category captured responses that took neither perspective (e.g. "(marketing is) a science." Second, sentiment varied from negative to neutral to positive. Examples of each can be seen in Table I. Based on these emerging themes, two independent judges coded each response according to its perspective (industry, consumer or neither) and its sentiment (negative, neutral or positive). Each judge began with a training set, coding a small subset of responses independently, then discussing with the authors to ensure clear demarcation between the themes and their categories. After training, the judges independently coded all participant responses. As in Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006), coder agreement was calculated as the percentage of responses that both judges independently classified into the same category. The agreement rate was high for both dimensions (perspective = 83 percent; sentiment = 91 percent), and the authors resolved any coding disagreements between the judges. Table II displays the full cross-tabulation of coded responses.

Results and discussion

Nearly 66 percent ($n = 625$) of respondents took an industry perspective in their responses, compared with only about 20 percent ($n = 193$) taking a consumer perspective and 13 percent ($n = 131$) taking neither. A clear divergence in sentiment across these perspectives also emerged. Of those responding with an industry perspective only 4.5 percent ($n = 28$) were negative, but of those responding from a consumer perspective, 51 percent ($n = 98$) were negative, a significant difference in the proportion of negative responses across the two groups ($t = 12.5$, $p < 0.001$), and consistent with the overall asymmetry of sentiment across the range of three perspectives ($\chi^2 = 263$, $p < 0.001$). A full cross-tabulation of responses appears in Table II.

If marketing is fundamentally concerned with exchange between business and customers, then it does not appear to communicate that message well, or at least not sufficiently enough to be top-of-mind. It appears that people choose to view marketing from either a customer perspective or a business perspective, with a majority opting for the latter. Notably, there is an asymmetry in sentiment across these two perspectives. Compared to the proportion of people who felt negative about marketing's role in business, a far greater proportion of people felt negative about the role of marketing in their own lives. In other words, even though marketing sets out to capture value by delivering it to customers, people generally see that marketing is good for business but not good for them.

This sentiment might be due to the way marketers communicate about what they do and how well they are doing it. Oftentimes marketers communicate their performance in ways that legitimize their role within organizations (Rust *et al.*, 2004). Financial valuations of brand equity signaled an acceleration of this stance among marketing managers (Eagle and Kitchen, 2000), and metrics to establish financial return-on-marketing have proliferated in the intervening years (e.g. Stewart, 2009). While those metrics certainly play a vital role in marketing, they

Table II Crosstabulation of "marketing is [...]" completions

	Perspective			
Sentiment	**Business**	**Consumer**	**Not business or consumer**	**Total**
Positive	204	60	48	312
Neutral	393	35	44	472
Negative	28	98	39	165
Total	625	193	131	949

Table I Example completions to "marketing is [...]"

	Perspective		
Sentiment	**Business**	**Consumer**	**Not business or consumer**
Positive	"[...] an invaluable tool for sales growth and company longevity"	"[...] a very helpful way to be informed about a product"	"[...] fun"
Neutral	"[...] selling services and products to a certain demographic"	"[...] alright as long as it is not pushy"	"[...] a science"
Negative	"[...] generally a waste of money"	"[...] a way to con me into buying stuff I don't need"	"[...] a necessary evil"

communicate only one side of the exchange that marketers consummate – the value delivered to the firm – and the media amplifies that communication by discussing marketers in terms of market share, revenue, profit and loss, and financial valuations of brand equity. Notably, this disconnect has been recognized by marketing managers, who lament that a focus on sales and finance hurts integrated marketing communications (Stuart and Kerr, 1999). Moreover, a recent model suggests that communications focusing on corporate performance diminish consumer identification with, and hence response to, companies (He and Mukherjee, 2009). Could consumer perceptions of marketing be due in part to the fact that the public discourse largely centers on marketing's contribution to the firm? Might perceptions be swayed if communications centered on the role that marketers play in making meaningful differences in people's lives? This is not to say that firms should not focus on or report marketing's financial performance. Rather, just as the marketing concept itself poses, perhaps an emphasis on both firm and customer value could alter people's perceptions.

To test this proposition, we designed an experiment in which participants read a passage about a marketer's performance. In one condition, the passage followed the status quo and focused primarily on how that performance contributed to the firm's value (i.e. financial performance), while in a second experimental condition the passage emphasized how that performance stemmed from value delivered to consumers. By comparing responses to these two passages, we can assess if the latter treatment is effective in altering perceptions of marketing. Next, we describe this study in detail.

Study 2

In this study we aimed to test the malleability of consumer perceptions of marketing by reframing the communication of a marketer's performance. Participants were asked to read a sample press release, which was manipulated across two experimental conditions. In one condition, the press release communicated the value derived by the firm from its marketing activities. The other condition adopted our proposed technique, with a press release communicating the value that the firm's marketing activities delivered to its customers. After reading the press release, participants worked on an unrelated filler task, and then completed the same "marketing is [...]" sentence as in study 1 in addition to some ancillary measures.

Stimuli and pre-test

Stimuli are replicated in the appendix. Participants were asked to read a fictitious press release from "Kesco Foods," a producer of baked goods and snacks. Information in the press release was manipulated across two experimental conditions. In both conditions the press release touted the company's growth as a result of its marketing activities. In one condition ("firm focused condition"), the press release followed the traditional format of touting the benefits the company earned – increased share price and profit margins, for example. In the other condition ("customer focused condition"), the press release focused on the benefits consumers derived – pleasing taste and nutrition, for example. The two press releases were written to be as equivalent as possible in terms of both language and length. Key sentences and phrases appeared verbatim in the two conditions, with the primary changes being what was cited as evidence of performance – financial benefits or customer value benefits. Each version scored equally on the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease scale, with scores of 46. The firm-focused press release was 217 words, while the customer-focused press release was 215 words.

A pre-test helped ensure that the stimuli manipulated the extent to which people believed that the business was concerned with customer value and that each was of equal reading difficulty. Using online software, fifty-one participants – different from those in the main study – were randomly assigned to read one of the press releases, and then to respond to interval-scaled items including, "to what extent do you think Kesco is concerned with benefitting the lives of the customers it serves," (1 = not at all/7 = a great deal) and "how easy or difficult was this article to read," (1 = extremely easy/ 7 = extremely difficult). As expected, the 27 respondents in the customer focused condition rated Kesco as having greater customer concern than did the 24 respondents in the firm focused condition ($M_{customer} = 5.50$ vs $M_{firm} = 4.63$, $p < 0.05$). The difference between conditions on the subjective reading difficulty item did not reach significance ($M_{customer} = 2.33$ vs M_{firm} 3.11, $p = 0.07$), corroborating the results from the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease scores.

Sample and procedure

A total of 160 participants were drawn from a representative sample of US consumers. Six respondents failed to complete the sentence (e.g. typing in "none") and were excluded from the analysis, yielding a usable sample of 154 respondents. Of the responding sample, 55 percent were female and the mean age was 40 (US population 50.8 percent female, median age of 37; US Census Bureau, 2010). A total of 83 percent of the sample reported income of at least $25,000 annually (US Population = 75 percent with income > $25,000; US Census Bureau, 2012a). Over half of our sample had received at least a two-year college degree; similarly, 56 percent of the US population completed at least some college or more (US Census Bureau, 2012b).

Participants began the study by reading their assigned press release, either the one focused on benefits to the company or the one focused on benefits to customers. To guard against demand effects, participants responded to a battery of questions prior to the main dependent variable. As an attention and comprehension check, participants were asked to describe what Kesco markets. Next, participants answered a series of demographic questions. Only after these several questions were they asked to complete the same "marketing is [...]" sentence as in study 1. On the following screen, participants were then asked to indicate the extent to which they believed marketers are concerned with benefiting the lives of their customers. Finally, to assess the extent to which the press release influenced perceptions, participants indicated their attitude toward a set of seven well-known national brands.

Measures

Participants were asked the open-ended question, "what does Kesco market?" All participants described Kesco commensurate with the information they received, a good indicator that they read and understood the presented passage. For responses to the "marketing is [...]" sentence completion item, the same coding scheme as used in study 1 was applied. Following a training set, two independent judges – different from those who coded the study 1 data – coded each response according to its perspective (industry, consumer or neither) and its sentiment (negative, neutral or positive). Again as in Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006), coder agreement was calculated as the percentage of responses that both judges independently classified into the same category. The agreement rate was high for both dimensions, about 88 percent in both perspective and sentiment, and the authors resolved any coding disagreements between the judges. Finally, the item to assess marketers' concern with benefiting the lives of their customers was just as that used for Kesco Foods in the pre-test ($M = 4.49$).

Results

The press release had less effect on participants' perspectives than it did on their sentiment in completing the statement, "marketing is [...]". Across both experimental conditions, about 71 percent ($n = 109$) of respondents took an industry perspective in completing the sentence, while 23 percent ($n = 35$) took a consumer perspective and the remainder took neither. But of the 76 participants who read the firm-focused press release, a smaller proportion responded that marketing was positive for consumers than responded that marketing was positive for industry (6.58 vs 25.0 percent, $t = 2.76$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly in this condition, a greater proportion responded that marketing was negative for consumers than those that responded that marketing was negative for industry (9.21 vs 0 percent, $t = 3.01$, $p < 0.01$). By contrast, these differences disappeared among the 78 participants who read the customer-focused press release, with no differences between the proportions who saw marketing as good for consumers and those who saw marketing as good for industry (18.0 percent each), nor between those who saw marketing as negative for consumers and those who saw marketing as negative for industry (3.85 vs 1.28 percent, $t = 1.00$, $p = 0.32$); these equalities are more in line with marketing's premise of value exchange. Comparing across experimental conditions, a greater proportion of respondents who read the customer-focused press release than those who read the firm-focused press release stated that marketing was good for customers (18.0 vs 6.58 percent, $t = 2.16$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, those in the customer-focused condition rated marketers' concern with benefitting the lives of their customers higher than did those in the firm-focused condition ($M_{customer} = 4.85$ vs $M_{firm} = 4.13$, $t = 2.99$, $p < 0.01$). In sum, the customer-focused press release seemed to have the effect of boosting perceptions of the value marketing creates for consumers, in turn nullifying the imbalances brought about by the firm-focused press release.

General discussion

Marketing proposes to provide the path to profitability – i.e. generating value for the firm – through value delivery to customers. While considerable research has borne out the veracity of this path (Rust *et al.*, 2004, 1995), there continues to be a clear gap between marketing practice and the way marketing is perceived by the public. Marketers know customer value is key to firm value, but consumers do not see firms this way. Our research suggests that marketers can make progress toward closing this gap by, ironically, being more market-oriented in communicating what exactly it is that they do and for whom they do it. The idea of exchanging value with customers as a basis for business extends back about a century, and it has been a core precept of marketing ever since marketing was formalized six decades ago. Despite this, the general public has always looked with leery eyes upon marketers. In study one we found modern day persistence in the public's perceptions of marketing, with people stating that marketing is overwhelmingly negative for consumers while being overwhelmingly positive for business.

In study two, though, we found that a simple re-framing does much to change consumer sentiment about what marketing does for people. When primed with marketer performance in terms of its benefits to the firm, participants' responses to "marketing is [...]" mirrored the pattern observed in study one. But when primed with marketer performance in terms of its benefits to consumers, that asymmetry disappeared; equal proportions of those who saw marketing from a business perspective and those who saw marketing from a consumer perspective each saw it as a good thing, reflective of the value exchange that is paramount to marketing.

Star (1989) suggested that mistargeting was responsible for marketing's low regard among the public. People are annoyed when they receive marketing communications that are not targeted at them, and frustrated when they have unmet needs that marketers do not target. The present results help resolve the first issue. Specifically, people may be less annoyed by marketing that is not intended for them if they know that fellow consumers will benefit from it. As shown in study two, though, people will not come to this perspective if the marketing communications remain focused only on marketing's contribution to the firm. Marketers need to reframe the way they talk about what they do. Of course, this is not about what marketers say in their advertisements or promotions, which almost universally focus on customer value. Those communications can only go so far in changing the public's perception of marketing since they are often decontextualized from firm performance and since consumers read much more meaning into them than is on the surface (cf. persuasion knowledge model, Friestad and Wright, 1994). This is about what marketers say in more other forums, such as in the media, to describe what they do. Moreover, we do not suggest that consumers should not be skeptical of marketers at all, as a healthy level of consumer skepticism is a necessary tension for efficient value exchange. But relatively speaking, it would be a boon to marketing if consumers saw it as something useful in their lives.

The prescribed technique found to be effective in study 2 has clear managerial implications. Marketers need to ease their emphasis on financial results in their communications because it throws the notion of value exchange off balance. Peter Drucker espoused that, as a philosophy, marketing is any firm's *raison d'être*, an idea that has only amplified through generations of managers and scholars (cf. Webster, 2008). However, as an organizational function, marketing's value is frequently called into question, with the response being an overreaction of financial measures of marketing's performance. Such an orientation misses the larger point of marketing – which is that business and customers benefit from its existence – and, based on the present work, jeopardizes the public's perceptions of marketing. By illuminating the value that they bring to people's lives along with the value they bring to the firm, marketers can bridge the gap between their intentions and how the public sees them.

Marketer emphasis on financial returns also puts the proverbial cart before the horse, since customers must drive financial returns. If value to consumers falls, then value to the firm will fall. Brand rankings for consumer value and for financial value tend to track fairly closely (cf. Clendaniel, 2011; Center for Positive Marketing, 2011; WPP, 2011). The value of marketing to customers and value of marketing to the firm go hand in hand. Yes, marketing managers must think and plan in financial terms, but they must do so with an equal orientation toward an equal public emphasis on consumer value.

While we have shown that merely communicating consumer-relevant performance enhances consumer perceptions of marketing, it is worth noting that it would not be enough for managers to simply report a greater range of performance measures. The primary focus should still be on actually delivering value to customers. Presumably, the act of reporting such consumer value metrics to the public should pressure marketers to credibly increase the consumer value of their offerings, so that their performance on those metrics would improve. In other words, the consumer bias to view marketing as primarily serving business interests should inspire marketers to better communicate how they serve consumer interests and, in turn, inspire them to actually better serve consumer interests.

This prescription extends to marketing scholars as well. Too often we discuss how our research can help marketers make more money without taking stock of how it can help them make customers' lives better. There are certainly outlets where the latter is emphasized, but making people's lives better should not be under the sole provenance of specific marketing journals. It is so fundamental to the essence of marketing that customer value implications need to be drawn out right alongside managerial implications. By not doing so, researchers are severely underestimating the impact of their work. Further, by focusing primarily on research implications for the firm, scholars may actively contribute to the public's perception that marketing is good for business but not for them.

This research can be extended in a number of different ways. First, the current study was based solely on US consumers. While we anticipate similar consumer perceptions among other industrialized nations, it would be useful to understand where and why differences arise in consumer perceptions of marketing, which other studies have started to address (Cui *et al.*, 2012). Second, we demonstrated one way to help overcome the public's perception that marketing is bad for them, but there are surely others throughout the range of the marketing mix that future research should uncover. Third, it would also be useful to know the exact extent to which marketing scholars balance the discussion of their research implications toward firm value over consumer value; a systematic analysis of marketing publications should be conducted. In closing, while there is a presently a gap between marketing's intentions and consumer perceptions, the right research and application thereof could give rise to a healthier relationship between marketing and its main constituency – consumers.

References

American Marketing Association (2007), "Definition of marketing", available at: www.marketingpower.com/Community/ARC/Pages/Additional/Definition/default.aspx

Center for Positive Marketing at Fordham University (2011), "V-Positive Report: Q4.2011", available at: www.centerforpositivemarketing.org/news/2012/03/09/retail-ruled-v-positive-q42011-full-report-available-now

Clendaniel, M. (2011), "The brands that survive will be the brands that make life better", *Fast Company*, available at: www.fastcoexist.com/1678768/the-brands-that-survive-will-be-the-brands-that-make-life-better

Cui, G., Lui, H., Chan, T. and Joy, A. (2012), "Decomposition of cross-country differences in consumer attitudes toward marketing", *The Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 214-224.

Dalsace, F. and Markovitch, D.G. (2009), "Is marketing becoming a dirty word? A longitudinal study of public perceptions of marketing", working paper, HEC Paris, available at: www.hec.fr/var/fre/storage/original/application/73173d4212f664cd69272b9e18636306.pdf

Darlin, D. (2007), "Don't call, don't write. Let me be", *The New York Times*, January, p. 20.

Eagle, L. and Kitchen, P. (2000), "Building brands or bolstering egos? A comparative review of the impact and measurement of advertising on brand equity", *Journal of Marketing Communication*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 91-106.

Fastenberg, D. (2011), "All-time 100 nonfiction books: no logo", *Time Magazine*, August 30, available at: http://entertainment.time.com/2011/08/30/all-time-100-best-nonfiction-books/#no-logo-by-naomi-klein

Friestad, M. and Wright, P. (1994), "The persuasion knowledge model: how people cope with persuasion attempts", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 1-31.

Fullerton, R.A. (1988), "How modern is modern marketing? Marketing's evolution and the myth of the 'production era'", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 52 No. 1, pp. 108-125.

Gaski, J.F. (2008), "The index of consumer sentiment toward marketing: validation, updated results, and demographic analysis", *Journal of Consumer Policy*, Vol. 31, pp. 195-216.

Goodbody, J. (1990), "For more consumers, advertising is the 'deceptive persuader'", *Adweek*, Vol. 5, March, p. 40.

He, H. and Mukherjee, A. (2009), "Corporate identity and consumer marketing: a process model and research agenda", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 1-16.

Kachersky, L. and Lerman, D. (2011), "Seven ways to think of your market in human terms", *Forbes AdVoice*, April 30, available at: www.forbes.com/sites/gyro/2012/04/30/seven-ways-to-think-of-your-market-in-human-terms/

Kaltcheva, V.D. and Weitz, B.A. (2006), "When should a retailer create an exciting store environment?", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 70 No. 1, pp. 107-118.

Kotler, P. (1969), "Broadening the concept of marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 10-15.

Kotler, P. and Keller, K. (2011), *Marketing Management*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Kucuk, S.U. (2009), "The evolution of market equalization on the internet", *Journal of Research for Consumers*, Vol. 16, available at: http://jrconsumers.com/Academic_Articles/issue_16/market_equalization_paper_academic.pdf

Moore, C.W. (1945), *Timing a Century: History of the Waltham Watch Company*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Oliver, R.L. (2010), *Satisfaction: A Behavioral Perspective on the Consumer*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY.

Packard, V. (1957), *The Hidden Persuaders*, David McKay Company, New York, NY.

Rust, R.T., Lemon, K.N. and Zeithaml, V.A. (2004), "Return on marketing: using customer equity to focus marketing strategy", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 109-127.

Rust, R.T., Zahorik, A.J. and Keiningham, T.L. (1995), "Return on quality (ROQ): making service quality financially accountable", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 59 No. 2, pp. 58-70.

Shaw, A.W. (1916), *An Approach to Business Problems*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Sheth, J.N. and Uslay, C. (2007), "Implications of the revised definition of marketing: from exchange to value creation", *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 302-307.

Sheth, J.N., Sisodia, R.S. and Barbulescu, A. (2006), "The image of marketing", in Sheth, J.N. and Sisodia, R.S. (Eds), *Does Marketing Need Reform?: Fresh Perspectives on the Future*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, pp. 26-38.

Sirgy, J.M. and Lee, D. (2008), "Well-being marketing: an ethical business philosophy for consumer goods firms", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 77 No. 4, pp. 377-403.

Star, S.H. (1989), "Marketing and its discontents", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 67 No. 6, pp. 148-154.

Stewart, D.W. (2009), "Marketing accountability: linking marketing actions to financial results", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 62 No. 6, pp. 636-643.

Stuart, H. and Kerr, G. (1999), "Marketing communication and corporate identity: are they integrated?", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 169-179.

US Census Bureau (2010), "Age and sex composition: 2010", available at: www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf

US Census Bureau (2012a), "2011 household income", available at: www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032012/hhinc/hinc01_000.htm

US Census Bureau (2012b), "Educational Attainment in the United States", available at: www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/cps/2012/tables.html

Webster, F.E. (2008), "Marketing IS management: the wisdom of Peter Drucker", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 20-27.

WPP (2011), "BrandZ top 100 most valuable global brands", available at: http://c3232792.r92.cf0.rackcdn.com/WPP_BrandZ_report_FINAL.pdf

Zeithaml, V.A. (1988), "Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means-end model and synthesis of evidence", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 52 No. 3, pp. 2-22.

Appendix. Study 2 stimuli

Firm focused condition
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
2012-212

Kesco Foods brings big benefits to investors
Boston, MA, Monday July 30, 2012 – Kesco Foods, a national baker and producer of commonly recognized snacks and energy bars, announced its second quarter earnings today. CFO Larry Graham was pleased to announce 9 percent growth this quarter, ahead of last year's earnings and 4 percent better than projected growth rates.

Mr. Graham attributes Kesco's success to its acquisition of a local Greek-style yogurt producer and a newly released twice-baked line of potato chips earlier this year. Both reduce manufacturing costs for the company. Mr. Graham stated that, "We have leveraged our stockpile of free cash to make investments that will directly impact the company's current and long-term profitability."

Kesco is the largest snack brand in the North East, making up 35 percent of sales in the region. In the financial markets, investors bid the company's share price up to $33.11. This 11 percent gain came on news that Kesco will pay out a dividend to shareholders within the next six weeks. To keep up with its growth over the last three months, Kesco hired 55 new production line workers and 13 new corporate employees at its Massachusetts-based headquarters. In addition, the company's profit margin increased from 12.8 to 14.3 percent. Mr Graham commented, "We will continue grow with product and manufacturing innovation; we see the foreseeable future as an exciting time for Kesco Foods and our investors."

Customer focused condition
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
2012-212

Kesco Foods brings big benefits to customers
Boston, MA, Monday July 30, 2012 – Kesco Foods, a national baker and producer of commonly recognized snacks and energy bars, announced its second quarter performance today. CFO Larry Graham was pleased to announce 9 percent growth this quarter, ahead of last year's earnings and 4 percent better than projected growth rates.

Mr Graham attributes Kesco's success to its acquisition of a local Greek-style yogurt producer and a newly released twice-baked line of potato chips earlier this year. Both are healthier snack choices for Kesco's customers. Mr Graham stated that, "Our customers are telling us they want great tasting, healthier foods and we are doing our best to give that to them."

Kesco is the largest snack brand in the North East, making up 35 percent of sales in the region. In an independent survey, consumers voted Kesco's yogurt as the most delicious, with many saying that they feel good fueling their bodies with the great-tasting nutrition Kesco's yogurt offers. Strong consumer demand has enabled Kesco to put local people to work, with the hiring of 55 new production line workers and 13 new corporate employees over the last three months at its Massachusetts-based headquarters. Mr Graham commented, "We will continue to grow as we better meet our customer's needs; we see the foreseeable future as an exciting time for Kesco Foods and our customers."

About the authors

Luke Kachersky is Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Fordham University Schools of Business and is the Research Director of the Center for Positive Marketing at Fordham University. His research interests include consumer value, and the role of self-concept in judgments and decisions. Luke Kachersky is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: kachersky@fordham.edu

Dawn Lerman is Professor of Marketing at the Fordham University Schools of Business. She serves as the Marketing Area Chair and as the Executive Director of the Center for Positive Marketing at Fordham University. Her research focuses on the field of consumer behavior with particular emphasis on consumer language processing.

Journal of Consumer Marketing
Volume 30 · Number 7 · 2013 · 544–552

Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of the article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto *to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present.*

Underlying most definitions of marketing is that its practices and activities are designed to deliver value to businesses and their clients. Some observers claim that marketing also has the capacity to benefit other stakeholders and society in general. Such beliefs can be traced back as far as the early 1900s.

Advances in technology means that the concept of value has expanded, particularly in recent times. In addition to individuals passively obtaining value, it is now common for it to be a product of co-creation involving consumer and marketer. A prime example of the latter is online platforms like Facebook where content is primarily generated by site users.

Marketing has come in for its fair share of criticism over the years. One recurring accusation is that too great an emphasis is placed on the value marketing activities bring to the firm. How performance can realize value to customers is deliberated much less in comparison. Satisfaction is often the mechanism used for measuring value, although its limitations are pointed out. Marketing is supposed to improve the lives of customers and the degree to which this occurs is considered by certain academics to be a true indication of value. Although some progress has been made in this respect, value generated by marketers for the firm remains considerably easier to ascertain and quantify.

Research conducted at various times over several decades reveals public skepticism about marketing activities such as advertising. In these surveys, a decreasing minority of respondents considered advertising as being useful and informative. Up to 80 percent of those contacted felt that advertisements were an "unwelcome persuasion" to purchase products they did not need. Anti-marketing legislation was introduced by the US government on the back of such consumer sentiments. It has also been shown that media judgment of marketing has become increasingly negative.

Why these unfavorable perceptions have persisted has attracted academic attention and two reasons are proposed. In the first instance, marketers are charged with extending their communication beyond the target audience and causing annoyance and frustration to those affected. It is the opinion of certain researchers that a similar outcome emerges if consumers believe that marketers are not meeting their needs. This is mooted as the second reason for the negativity that marketing attracts. These challenges are being addressed, however, and marketers have become better placed to serve the public as a result. A variety of "niche channels" are available to enable different consumer segments to be more accurately targeted. Whether these major changes have altered public perceptions of marketing is not clear, therefore Kachersky and Lerman conduct a study to explore the issues further.

In the first of two studies, consumers in the US were invited to participate in an online survey which involved completing a sentence about marketing. Male and females with an average age of 47 were almost equally represented in a sample that broadly reflected the US population at the time.

Analysis showed that:

1 Almost 66 percent of those surveyed replied using an industry perspective, around 20 percent a consumer perspective. The remainder took neither perspective.
2 Positive, negative and neutral sentiments were evident. Most significant was the fact that negativity was expressed by 51 percent of those replying from a consumer perspective compared to the 4.5 percent that defined marketing from an industry perspective.

From this, the authors suggest that marketing is failing to effectively communicate its supposed purpose of serving customers as well as business. This leads to the assumption that people are likely to believe that marketing benefits one at the expense of the other. A communication bias whereby marketers over-emphasize how their efforts benefit the organization is deemed as a major cause of these prevailing consumer attitudes. The media contributes to this problem by evaluating marketers with regard to financial performance metrics and market share. While such communication helps justify the function of marketing within firms, the customer feels detached. Kachersky and Lerman thus propose that the focus on firm and consumer value needs to be more equal if public perceptions of marketing are to change.

The second study was designed to examine whether consumer perceptions of marketing could be influenced by how communication is framed. Subjects were exposed to one of two fictitious press releases from a manufacturer of baked foods and snacks. In one version the message focused on how marketing activities had positively influenced company performance with regard to such as profit margins and share price. The other emphasized consumer benefits, with taste and nutrition being examples. Unrelated "filler" tasks were then completed along with demographic details before participants completed the same marketing-related question as in study one. Finally, respondents were asked to indicate their attitude to some well-known national brands. Females accounted for 55 percent of the 154 participants, who were aged 40 on average.

Findings here revealed that the idea that marketing was good for consumers was higher among those reading the customer-oriented press release than among those who read the release focusing on the firm. When it came to judging the concern of marketers with benefiting customer lives, similar indications prevailed. The authors conclude that people are more likely to perceive that marketing creates value for customers when a press release is customer-oriented. They feel that this condition also helps negate the "imbalances" that the company-focused press release generates.

Business succeeds best when mutual value is created for firms and their customers. Marketing plays a key role in this exchange. However, this study shows that marketers must better communicate that providing customers with value is top of their agenda. Kachersky and Lerman propose that the findings here can help marketers to appease customer annoyance and frustration that arises when they received communication which is not appropriate to them. They argue that people will be less negative if they believe that other consumers will benefit from the communication. However, this is on the provision that marketing messages have a customer orientation.

Journal of Consumer Marketing
Volume 30 · Number 7 · 2013 · 544–552

It is also pointed out that the need for a change in emphasis does not apply to advertisements or promotions, where the focus on customer value is already strong. Studies have previously noted that such communications are "decontextualized" from the company's performance and therefore limited in power to alter how the public perceives marketing. The shift instead is more needed in what marketers relay in the media and other forums. Specifically, they are advised to dilute the weight given to financial results as this disrupts the premise that value is exchanged between customer and firm.

In the view of the authors, reporting a wider range of performance measures would be insufficient. It is actually delivering value to the customer that really matters and this should be the primary objective. Publicizing consumer value measures forces firms to build additional customer value into their offerings in order to raise performance on those metrics.

Extending this research to consumers in other nations might further enhance understanding of how the public perceives marketing and the differences that materialize. Another option is to explore different ways that might help customers feel more positive towards marketers.

(A précis of the article "Bridging marketing's intentions and consumer perceptions". Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)