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Establishing the Scope of Marketing Practice: Insights from Practitioners

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Establishing the Scope of Marketing Practice: Insights from Practitioners

Purpose – Describing marketing practices is fundamental to understanding both the scope of marketing practice and the actual value it adds to the organization. This paper clarifies the reach of marketing practice and the nature of activities that marketers carry out.

Design/Methodology/approach – The study uses mixed methods, involving qualitative document analysis, qualitative interviews and a quantitative managerial survey.

Findings – The findings reveal consistency in the views of academics and practitioners across the following disaggregated elements of practice: stakeholder and relationship marketing, customer analysis, marketing-mix management/marketing planning, and the centrality of customers. However, when these themes are integrated into broader categories of practice, the activities are parceled and prioritized in different ways by the different data sources.

Practical implications – The findings have implications for how marketing is practiced and taught and for the future research agenda.

Originality/value – This study considers the functional practices within marketing and clarifies the scope of marketing practice.

Keywords – Marketing practice; management practice; market orientation; marketing concept; marketing management.

1. Introduction

The overall practice of management is argued to involve a range of practices which embody a number of activities. Attention devoted to the so-called ‘practice turn’ in several functional management areas is encouraging scrutiny of how these managerial activities are described and interpreted (Schatzki *et al.*, 2001; Whittington, 2006). In some functional areas these practices have become well defined and codified. Research in human resources management (HRM) and operations management, for example, has evolved to establish specific individual meanings (see Birdi *et al.*, 2008) and content for particular practices; while management accounting has developed a more empirical and critical perspective on the enactment of practice (Ahrens and Chapman, 2007). Yet strategic management and marketing have lagged behind in codifying relevant practices and describing the specific activities which managers carry out (Skålén and Hackley, 2011; Svensson, 2007). This paper clarifies the reach of marketing practice and the nature of activities that marketers carry out¹. Establishing the scope of marketing practice is timely, as the diverse and challenging environment in which marketers operate demands the use of well-tuned practices.

Two significant outcomes stem from delineating the scope and reach of marketing practice: firstly, a contribution to the debate about the value of marketing to the organization; and secondly, the potential to facilitate mutual learning about management practices and wider dissemination among practitioners. Interest in the practice turn and the closer scrutiny of managerial activities associated with it have been reflected in calls for marketing to prove its worth to the organization. A report by Deloitte (2008, p.1) refers to a “lack of a common understanding of marketing, and what it delivers to and within the organization...” and calls

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¹ Different authors use the terms ‘marketing practice’ and ‘marketing practices’ in different ways. In this paper we use ‘marketing practice’ to refer to the overall set of marketing practices in which practitioners engage. We

for practitioners to clarify marketing's role in achieving growth. Meanwhile the Marketing Science Institute (MSI, 2012) has set a priority for research to "better understand how organizational structure and marketing capabilities influence business performance". A need therefore exists to ascertain the nature of what marketing practitioners actually do and to consider what contributions they make to the wider organization. There are also concerns that business schools are becoming detached from managerial practice (Bennis and O'Toole, 2006), and suggestions that the professionalization of management needs to be reconsidered (Ferlie *et al.*, 2010) to enable adequate models for management education to emerge. These fears echo broader questions around the professionalization of the managerial function itself, in which issues of claimed jurisdiction are critical (Abbott, 1988).

Despite these developments, definitions of marketing practice are rarely found in the literature (Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006). Instead, various lines of inquiry frame issues related to marketing practice. Studies focusing on the idea that the practice of marketing rests on achieving a market orientation (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990; Deshpandé and Farley, 1998) conclude that all functional areas need to be involved in achieving that orientation. The fact that other functions participate in marketing practices reinforces the need to better understand the role which marketing plays and can claim within the organization. Following this line of thought, Moorman and Rust (1999) argue that the marketing function is central to managing the connection between the organization and the customer; and that the extent to which these contributions are well managed impacts on performance. Other investigations rekindle the debate about the position and influence of marketing within organizations also addressing the role of the department of marketing (e.g., Verhoef and Leeflang, 2009). A stream of research examining 'how firms relate to their markets' delineates profiles of marketing practice centering on the degree to which certain

use the terms 'marketing practices' to refer to the specific micro-level marketing activities and tasks that are carried out by marketers.

marketing attitudes and behaviours are exercised within the organization (Brodie *et al.*, 2008; Coviello, *et al.*, 2003; Coviello *et al.*, 2002). Other studies examining the practice turn in marketing, consider marketing practices from both consumption/consumer (e.g., Brownlie and Hewer, 2011; Schaun *et al.*, 2009) and within the organization (e.g., Fellesson, 2011; Jaakkola, 2011) perspectives (Skålén and Hackley, 2011); or address the partly overlapping idea of how marketing produces markets (Araujo *et al.*, 2010; Araujo, 2007), under a “practice-based approach to markets and marketing” (Araujo *et al.*, 2008).

Although previous studies provide useful insights into marketing practice, they do not explicitly examine the specific actions and activities which comprise marketing practice. Instead, they focus on the marketing’s broader role and contribution within the organization (e.g. Moorman and Rust, 1999; Verhoef and Leeflang, 2009), or the prevalence of particular marketing practices (e.g. relationship or transactional) in relating to markets (e.g. Coviello *et al.*, 2002; Coviello *et al.*, 2000). That is, a ‘bottom-up’ perspective of marketing and how it is carried out by practitioners in the organization is still under-researched (Skålén and Hackley, 2011). This paper provides such a perspective by focusing on the following empirical question: what is the scope of marketing practice? The study examines the specific marketing activities, tasks and processes that are produced by or involve marketers; even though some of these may take place outside of the marketing function. The aim is to achieve a better understanding of the micro-level practices in which marketing practitioners engage. The investigation draws on various academic and practitioner sources that are connected to the practice of marketing, resorting to a combination of research methods including document analysis, qualitative interviews and quantitative data. Findings have implications for marketing academics and practitioners regarding how marketing is practiced and taught and for the future research agenda.

2. Background

Management practice

The academic literature presents various definitions of practice and practices and what they entail (Jaakkola, 2011). According to the theory of social practices perspective, practices are *routinized bodily performances* controlled by certain *sets of mental activities*, which are associated with objects, knowledge and language (Reckwitz 2002: 251). Schaun et al. (2009: 31) state that “practices are linked and implicit ways of understanding, saying, and doing things. They comprise a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of behaviors that include practical activities, performances, and representations, or talk”. Consequently, practice implies ‘intentionality’ (Ahrens and Chapman, 2007) and is performative (Araujo *et al.*, 2008).

Research in the management area has used the notion of practice(s) to consider the nature and effects of management practice and to carry out focused investigations addressing the role of specific management functions within organizations. Under the general theme of management practices, Bloom and van Reenen (2006) study practices across medium-sized manufacturing industries in the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and France. They apply a measurement of management practices in four areas: operations, monitoring, targets, and incentives. Other researchers consider practice in different settings, including HRM (e.g., Birdi *et al.*, 2008; Brewster *et al.*, 2008; Martin-Alcazar *et al.*, 2008; Maybey and Robertson, 1990; Wood and de Menezes, 2008), operations management (Cua *et al.*, 2001; Shah and Ward, 2003; Voss, 1995), and finance and accounting (Ahrens and Chapman, 2007; Nixon, 1995; Sangster, 1993). Such studies examine practice from three broad perspectives: (1) practice as a set of procedures embodied (codified) in professional texts and/or that have professional roots (e.g., Sangster, 1993); (2) practice as entailing the actions and practices of

people operating in a certain area (e.g., Ahrens and Chapman, 2007); and (3) practice as defined by the required skills and job design (e.g., Dean and Snell, 1991). Many of the studies are concerned with specifying the impact of functional practices on overall business performance or other specific performance measures (e.g., Birdi *et al.*, 2008; Ichniowski, Shaw, and Prensushi, 1997). A common denominator is that these studies help to delineate the borders of practice for their respective functional areas. Such delimitation contributes to the establishment of each function's explicit and distinctive knowledge and ideology (professionalism) and its respective progress and status (professionalization) (Ellson, 2008; Johnson, 1984; Whittington and Whipp, 1992).

Abbott (1988) argues that a key role in developing and extending the jurisdiction of a particular profession lies in the nature of the abstraction involved. He identifies two forms of abstraction for legitimizing such claims: a weak form in which the specific context is abstracted and a stronger form in which the subject is elaborated in "...many layers of increasingly formal discourse" (pp. 102). Within the management field, Abbott suggests that professionalization has mainly relied on weak form abstractions. He further argues that where formalized abstractions exist, these have not worked well, perhaps because the specific context is integral and essential to understanding managerial issues (1988).

Many textbooks claim to perform a significant role in codifying both knowledge and practice. In marketing, and management as a whole, where useful knowledge about practice is usually context dependent, the issue of what can and cannot be incorporated in textbooks is contested. Duguid (2005, pp.112), for instance, argues that practices cannot be fully codified into codebooks or textbooks:

The codification of knowledge may be less a matter of translation (though translation itself is rarely innocent) than transformation, whereby the codified no longer serves

the purpose of the tacit it replaces. Uncodified knowledge provides background context and warrants for assessing the codified. Background no longer works as background when it is foregrounded.

Furthermore, the few empirical and historical studies which examine the evolution of textbooks in management tend to emphasize the incorporation of new research and theory rather than practice. For instance, in considering the evolution of business finance textbooks Norgaard (1981, pp.43) anticipates a likely convergence between texts for undergraduates and graduates, noting that “At the graduate level, texts will continue to bring the students closer to current research and will better explain past research”. The content of mainstream textbooks in functional areas of management is therefore likely to be substantially convergent at any one point and to be rather past, or at best present, orientated with respect to the codification of theory and practice. The implication is that management in generic terms, and marketing specifically, are more likely to expand their jurisdiction by focusing on what Abbott terms “the actual work of managers” and abstracting from this the particular tasks which can be systematically routinized.

Marketing practice defined

Relatively few actual definitions of marketing practice are found in the marketing literature. As Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006, p. 842) note “the term marketing practice rarely has been defined, its most general use seems to be as a catchall for that which is not marketing theory. In short, it refers to what sellers do (or should do).” Reflecting on the American Marketing Association (AMA, 2012) definition of marketing helps to delineate the basic scope of marketing activity: “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 ” (approved October 2007). This definition describes

marketing as the performance of an activity, involving a set of institutions and processes, emphasizing value creation for customers and other stakeholders. This perspective widens the scope of marketing to include its influence on society, a development that Sheth and Uslay (2007: 306) consider to be "... certainly a step forward [because] it maintains a stakeholder perspective, and it does not limit the scope of marketing to organizations. The roles of institutions and processes, as well as marketing's impact on society, are clearly acknowledged." Even so, marketing definitions tend to overlook the "how" aspect of marketing and give little insight into the detailed activities undertaken by practitioners which collectively comprise marketing practice. An in-depth view of these activities from a practitioner perspective has the potential to provide a much needed greater understanding of the nature and scope of the marketing process (Gronroos, 2006).

The idea of marketing as a series of processes is reflected in some 'practitioner-oriented' books, many of which are more closely attuned than traditional marketing textbooks to the actual context in which marketing practices take place. McDonald *et al.* (2000) introduce the notion of pan-company marketing which they see as responsible for diffusing customer focus throughout the organization, an idea that is developed in relation to the impact of digital marketing in McDonald and Wilson (2002). The processes involved in delivering superior customer value are the focus for Piercy (2009), while McDonald and Wilson (2011) examine those associated with developing and implementing marketing plans.

Marketing practice: The marketing function and market orientation

Despite the attention given to processes in the practitioner-oriented publications, the research literature on marketing practice tends not to focus on the activities performed by marketing practitioners. Instead, studies examining the role of marketing consider marketing

practice from a functional/cultural perspective and/or from a market orientation perspective². Hooley *et al.* (1990) develop a study that addresses the functional and cultural (guiding philosophy) components of marketing. They identify aspects related to the marketing function—namely, sales support, promotion, and customer needs identification and matching. In addition, they specify aspects related to marketing as a philosophy reporting the scope of marketing within the company—that is, confined to the marketing department or as a guiding philosophy for the entire organization. Moorman and Rust (1999) establish that the marketing function is responsible for managing the connection between the organization and the customer. This connection occurs predominantly at three levels: customer-product, customer-service delivery and customer financial accountability. Verhoef and Leeflang (2009) extend this view, attributing capabilities to the marketing department that include creativity, innovativeness, accountability and integration/cooperation with other departments.

The market orientation perspective addresses marketing from an organizational culture or from a market intelligence point of view. According to Darroch *et al.* (2004, p. 33): “[A] market orientation is a type of organizational culture ... that is intensely customer-centric in focus, directing organizational decision making to meet explicit and latent customer needs at a profit”. Consequently, studies try to conceptualize market orientation and to gauge its impact on business performance. For example, Narver and Slater (1990) view market orientation as entailing three dimensions: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional co-ordination. They identify a positive effect of market orientation on sales growth (Narver *et al.*, 1999) and replicate the results in a subsequent study (Slater and Narver, 2000). Focusing on market intelligence, Kohli *et al.* (1993) recognize distinct market orientation themes (i.e., intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination, and responsiveness) and also view

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² A parallel discussion pertains to the existing gap between theory and practice and relates to how scholars and

profitability as an outcome (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Following Narver and Slater and Kohli *et al.*'s seminal works on market orientation, a proliferation of studies looked at the relationship between market orientation and performance measures in different types of companies and contexts. For example, Hooley *et al.* (2000) and Subramanian and Gopalakrishna (2001) consider market orientation in the context of transition economies, and Pelham (2000) examines market orientation within small and medium-sized enterprises. Other researchers consider the relationship between market orientation and specific variables; for example, Lai and Cheng (2005) reveal that market orientation and quality orientation are complementary. However, none of these studies explicitly refer to, or clearly define, marketing practice or practices per se.

Marketing practice: How firms relate to their markets

A parallel area of research views marketing practice as entailing how firms relate to their markets (Brodie *et al.*, 2008; Coviello *et al.*, 2002). Coviello, Brodie, and Munro (1997) and Coviello *et al.* (2003) explicitly use the term “marketing practices” to refer to broad notions of transactional marketing and relational marketing. Transactional marketing centres on transaction marketing and involves achieving customer satisfaction by managing the traditional marketing mix, implying one-way communication from sellers to buyers. Relational marketing embraces practices around ongoing company and buyer relationships and may entail database marketing, e-marketing, interaction marketing, and/or network marketing. Taking the organization as the unit of analysis, research in this area addresses marketing practice from multi-theory, multi-method, and multi-dimensional perspectives and has evolved to gauge the prevalence of practice across different firm types/sizes, business

practitioners either connect or do not connect (e.g., Cornelisson, 2002; Hales, 1999; Kelemen and Bansal, 2002; Wensley, 2002). However, an in-depth analysis of the various contributions is beyond the scope of this study.

sectors, and cultures (e.g., Brodie *et al.*, 1997; Coviello *et al.*, 2002; Coviello *et al.*, 2000; Dadzie *et al.*, 2008; Pels, Brodie, and Johnston, 2004).

Micro-level marketing practices

Existing research examining marketing practice tends to focus less on the micro-level activities featured in the related literature on management practices. Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006) suggest that practice should be regarded at the micro level and should encompass the specific tasks undertaken by different players. By focusing on a specific set of procedures it is possible to make empirical distinctions between ‘what is done’ and ‘how well it is done’.

Although a focus on micro-level activities is found in the management practice literature, it is rarely seen in marketing studies. Thus the study presented here takes a practice-based approach to marketing, relying on a “performative idiom”, such that the research accounts for “emergent and unfolding practices that actors engage in” (Araujo *et al.*, 2008, p. 7).

Consequently, marketing practice can be considered to encompass the process and tasks in which those operating within a marketing role in organizations engage. This is intrinsically linked to the professionalization of the field. In fact, research has addressed marketing’s professional legitimacy and impact in dealing with clients and with respect to other functions inside the organization (Svensson, 2007). This line of research includes, for example, work conducted by advertising agencies (e.g., Moeran, 2009; Alvesson, 1994) as marketing institutions. Yet the professional boundaries of marketing are conflicting. Abbott (1988, pp.233-234) explains the history behind this confusion:

Professional jurisdiction in (the) area ... now called marketing was created through a slow process of enclosure. Four groups participated – advertising, economics, journalism and psychology. For the two academic fields of economics and psychology marketing was a part-time activity. For advertising it provided a potential avenue to

professional status, one that proved to be ... a dead end. For journalism, marketing provided an ambiguous link between its qualitative information jurisdiction and the practical realities of media support. As might be expected, these diverse interests clouded the marketing jurisdiction considerably.

This absence of boundaries is worsened by the blinkered view of actual marketing practice conveyed in many marketing textbooks. As the earlier discussion explained, these problems emerge partly because new textbook editions tend to focus more on incorporating new research and theory than on practice. Typically they focus little on the context in which marketing takes place, portraying marketing as entailing pre-established activities, tools and goals that are extrinsic to practitioners' sense-making of their activity (Svensson, 2007; cf. Brownlie and Saren, 1997). Thus although these textbooks help to shape how knowledge about marketing practice is developed and to establish marketing roles, they also reflect the often weak link between academic and practitioner worlds (Baines *et al.*, 2009; Ford *et al.*, 2010; Currie *et al.*, 2010; Lee and Greenley, 2010).

The literature discussion raises questions regarding the scope of marketing practice and how it may be studied. Thus we used a multi-methods approach that we describe next.

3. Research design

This study combines qualitative text-based document analysis, qualitative interviews and quantitative data collection. Methods were grouped in three parts: (1) a review of five widely-used introductory marketing textbooks and interviews with academics concerning the coverage of these texts; (2) an analysis of advertisements for marketing-related job vacancies; and (3) a quantitative managerial survey of marketing practitioners. The decision to resort to various sources was aligned with the research objective to examine the micro-level actions

and activities which comprise marketing practice. The first two parts of the data gathering provide an overview of how marketing practice is described (textbooks) and specified (job advertisements). The job advertisements also provided insights into how practitioners portray their activities. These parts were deliberately exploratory and ‘bottom up’, avoiding preconceptions about how marketing practices would be designated. Instead, the marketing activities referred to in the sources were allowed to emerge, enabling a broad understanding of marketing practice to be captured. These sources helped to frame the roles which marketers carry out. The third part of the data collection, the quantitative managerial survey, enabled marketing practices to be specified by asking practitioners what they actually do within their organization, thus capturing the ‘bottom up’ nature of their activities. Despite the fact that this part of data gathering used a quantitative approach, the questionnaire content was derived from qualitative interviews with managers. During this discussion a more detailed, bottom-up understanding of the scope and reach of marketing activities was achieved. Although the particular context in which market practice occurs is not considered in the fieldwork, it is possible from the data to derive patterns of marketing practice. To avoid inconsistencies that might arise as a consequence of changing terminology, all data sources (publications and the survey) fit the data collection period.

Text-based document analysis

The text-based document analysis was qualitative through the exploration of emerging themes in the data that would capture the nature of marketing practice. Such analysis enabled greater flexibility in defining categories through an iterative process of data examination and coding (Bryman, 2001). The objects of analysis were marketing textbooks and classified advertisements.

Textbooks analysis. Textbooks play an important role in shaping the marketing syllabi for students in higher education and practitioners who take executive learning courses. As most courses are insufficiently large to justify a custom-made text, offerings tend to be broad in coverage to cater to a range of courses and students (Dibb and Stern, 1998). In a climate in which learning resources are increasingly available on the Internet and book sales are declining, the desire among publishers for high-volume texts is unlikely to change. At the same time, publishers are under pressure to extend the time between revisions, currently around three to five years. Although the resulting time lag between publication of research in scholarly journals and inclusion in textbooks has fueled debate about the state of marketing knowledge and the suitability of these books as a teaching source (Tregear, 2010),³ no other resources are likely to supersede these books in the short run. As such, their inclusion as a way of framing marketing practice is warranted.

This study selected five widely-used introductory marketing textbooks for consideration, three authored from the United Kingdom and two authored from the United States. Combining UK and US texts is appropriate since both types are widely used in the UK market which is where the data were gathered. It is also the case that many of the UK versions are derived from US equivalents. Guidance from two of the largest publishers operating in the UK was used to identify the specific texts to be analyzed, based on their views about the most widely adopted texts in UK business schools at the time. Introductory level texts were chosen, since such books are typically the first academic source which marketing students encounter. In order to validate the findings, results were cross-checked with the analysis of three additional introductory texts (Adcock, *et al.*, 2001; Blythe, 2005; Hill and O’Sullivan, 2004). The textbook review involved examining the basic marketing constructs included in the

introductory chapters of each book and the overall content's scope of each text to appreciate their coverage of marketing practice related topics.

The extent to which the content of the sources reflects what is actually taught was validated and confirmed with interviews conducted with five marketing professors from three UK business schools. The interviews explored individuals' understanding of marketing practice and of the respective teaching contents. They further addressed the relevance of the themes yielded by the textbook analysis and how they mirror their teaching themes. Given the likelihood of a distinction between academic sources used in the teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate (MBA) students, the marketing professors were also questioned about differences between undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Classified advertisements analysis. The analysis of classified advertisements captured a practitioner perspective on the scope of marketing practice. The study collected data from job advertisements in the classified section of *Marketing Week*, a weekly publication aimed at U.K.-based marketing practitioners. These advertisements provided a rich source of information about the tasks, activities, and responsibilities associated with a range of marketing-related jobs, from which this study could gain an understanding of the scope of marketing practice. The selected advertisements were from eight issues of *Marketing Week* covering a three-month period. There was a minimum of a two-week period between each issue to reduce the likelihood of the same advertisements being analyzed more than once. A new 'start' number was assigned to each magazine issue, with every tenth advertisement being selected. Overall, the analysis entailed 10% of advertisements, for a total of 106 advertisements.

et al. (2006), and Stringfellow and Ennis (2006).

Two researchers working together followed a systematic process to analyze job advertisements. Following Segal and Hershberger's (2006) procedure, each job was assigned a unique identifier to trace the job back to its original source if required. They also noted the job title and reviewed the wording of each advertisement, recording all references to the job tasks and responsibilities in a master list. To generate the classification scheme, the researchers worked to identify the tasks and activities included in the job specifications. In an initial pass-through of the data, they created a simple record of the details, making no attempt at this stage to either reduce or categorize the data. However, details of generic skill requirements (e.g., oral/written communications skills) and personal attributes (e.g., being calm in a crisis) were specifically excluded because they are not within the scope of this project. In a second pass-through of the data, the researchers sub-divided the activities in the master list into categories on which they had previously agreed. Although some overlap between activities was evident during this classification process, the researchers considered the tasks distinct enough to be readily allocated to one of the groups. Two experienced marketing academics and one marketing researcher, all of whom were unconnected with the research, subsequently checked and validated the classification.

Managerial survey

A parallel data collection involved the development and testing of a scale of marketing practice activities. Scale items were generated from qualitative exploratory interviews with marketing academics and practitioners in the United Kingdom, during which questions about the scope and components of marketing practice were posed. These interviews provided an in-depth understanding of the actions and activities which marketing practice entails. The questionnaire design was also informed by prior studies, from which some aspects of the scales were developed (e.g., Hooley and Lynch, 1985). Although previously used measures were not specifically designed to capture marketing practice, they did encompass a detailed

understanding of the range of activities and tasks associated with the marketing process.

Overall, the research instrument investigated the degree to which firms engage in marketing actions and activities. The unit of analysis was the sub-unit of the organization responsible for marketing and marketing practitioners were the key informants. Participants at a seminar reviewed the face validity of the scale items, which resulted in several modifications being made. Members of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, the main U.K. body of professional marketers, reviewed a piloted, paper-based version of the research instrument. Subsequently, the instrument was converted and tested for an online format.

Data were collected through an e-mail survey of Chartered Institute of Marketing members as part of a regular electronic newsletter mailing. Participants clicked on a Web link that took them directly to the online questionnaire containing questions about marketing practice within the respondent's organization. A total of 146 usable questionnaires were obtained. Data analysis included exploratory factor analysis (EFA) applied to the marketing practice variables to test the data grouping and to reduce the number of variables, followed by the computation of the coefficient alpha (Churchill, 1979). This set of items was subsequently used in the confirmatory factor (CFA) analysis to allow for a stricter interpretation of the assessment of construct unidimensionality (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988).

The sample includes respondents working in a variety of marketing-related roles, ranging from the most senior directors to people occupying more junior marketing executive jobs, mostly in the areas of marketing management (e.g., channel management, product management, marketing communications), international marketing, business development, customer service, marketing research, and marketing consultancy. Most of the respondents (82.2%) had been in their current position for five years or fewer and had been working for the company (74.5%) for a similar period. They worked in a wide range of organizations

operating in business-to-business markets (26.9%), services (37.6%), the non-profit sector (18.3%), manufacturing (8.6%), business-to-consumer markets (5.4%), and retailing (3.2%).

4. Findings

Textbook results

The analysis of introductory chapters and textbook coverage highlights a range of constructs, such as the marketing concept, market orientation, marketing process, marketing management, and marketing practice. Table 1 provides a summary of the textbook analysis; the first row reflects how each source captures the overall marketing process (though not all sources use this exact terminology).

INSERT TABLE I HERE

Definitions of the marketing concept are characterized by (1) a focus on satisfying customer needs, (2) the concept of a transaction, and (3) the notion of an exchange of something of value (e.g., a product) with something else (e.g., a financial reward) (Kotler *et al.*, 2005). A recurring theme is marketing's role in helping firms achieve their objectives (Jobber, 2004). Similarly, "the marketing concept holds that the key to achieving its organizational goals consists of the company being more effective than competitors in creating, delivering, and communicating superior customer value to its chosen target markets" (Kotler, 2003, p. 19). Pride and Ferrell (2003) refer to the marketing concept as a philosophy that guides an organization's activities, enabling the firm to achieve goals *and* meet customer needs.

Action is sometimes implied through the process or activities associated with marketing; that is, “marketing consists of individual and organizational activities that facilitate and expedite satisfying exchange relationships in a dynamic environment through the creation, distribution, promotion and pricing of goods, services and ideas” (Dibb *et al.*, 2006, p. 7). All the reviewed texts view market orientation as the philosophy associated with marketing and the means through which organizations put the marketing concept into practice. Achieving a market orientation is inherently linked with the process of marketing, in that it is based on the notion of the actions organizations must take to become customer focused. Pride and Ferrell (2003, p. 12) draw directly from the work of Kohli and Jaworski (1990) on market orientation. Jobber (2004) also stresses the strategic and proactive nature of this process for identifying market opportunities. The objective of market-oriented organizations is to create customer value, a recurring theme linked to the idea of customer satisfaction (Pride and Ferrell, 2003).

The notion of ‘process’ is relevant to this study because the focus on marketing practice includes the activities through which marketing principles are implemented. Kotler *et al.* (2005) describe the marketing process as marketing’s role within the firm and the activities linked with it, including (1) analyzing marketing opportunities, (2) selecting target markets, (3) developing the marketing mix, and (4) managing the marketing effort. This view is consistent with the process Dibb *et al.* (2006) describe and is implicit in Jobber’s (2004, pp. 6, 7) description that “market-oriented firms adopt a proactive search for market opportunities, use market information as a basis for analysis and organizational learning, and adopt a long-term strategic perspective on markets and brands.” Further evidence of the marketing process appears in discussions about “marketing management”, a term that describes the activities associated with bringing about market orientation. According to Dibb *et al.* (2006, p. 28), the marketing process is “the process of planning, organizing, implementing and controlling

activities to facilitate and expedite exchanges effectively and efficiently.” Pride and Ferrell (2003) also describe this process, and Kotler *et al.* (2005, p. 13) imply it in their description of “the art and science of choosing target markets and building profitable relationships with them.”

Kotler *et al.* (2005) make the only direct reference to marketing practice, viewing it as the manner in which firms effectively apply marketing principles. Kotler (2003) refers briefly to marketing practice when explaining how the new economy is changing traditional marketing, with increasing activity surrounding e-business and customer relationship management (CRM). Elsewhere, connections are implied in descriptions of activities linked to the marketing process and marketing management. Some authors drill down to describe marketing management elements; for example, Pride and Ferrell (2003, p. 17) define planning activities linked with marketing management as “a systematic process of assessing opportunities and resources, determining marketing objectives, and developing a marketing strategy and plans for implementation and control.” These sub-definitions reveal the marketing tasks/activities that are associated with practice. Overall, this treatment of marketing practice links the concept to the marketing activities/tasks in which companies engage.

Textbook results validation: Interviews with academics

In order to validate our analysis, interviews with marketing professors were used to determine the thoroughness of the marketing topics in Table I and to consider the need for tailoring of teaching delivery to reflect specific course or student body requirements. All interviewees found the list of provided topics to be sufficient, variously describing the content of a “fundamental” nature, “comprehensive” and “complete”. They also suggested that although the basic or “fundamental” topics to be covered alter little for different audiences,

the manner of delivery may do so. As one professor explained, “I don’t think the topics differ a great deal at different levels. Basically at higher levels of study (final year undergraduate, Masters or MBA), I think that students should be synergizing aspects of the marketing process, thinking critically and evaluating implications. I don’t think the topics need to change for them to be doing this.” Another described undergraduate teaching as being more “concept-led”, with the emphasis at MBA “much more about application and the practical circumstances encountered in ‘doing’ marketing”.

Classified advertisement results

The analysis of the advertisements captures the range of reviewed advertisements and the diversity of the marketing roles they contain. The tasks and activities range from the highly strategic, including business development and visioning, to the distinctly operational, such as liaising with agencies and copywriters. There were 15 senior strategic or business development roles, 33 involving managing operations, 58 concerned with operational or implementation aspects of marketing, with four junior support roles. A systematic analysis enables the classification of these activities according to whether they are related to ‘marketing strategy and business development and planning’, ‘analyzing customers and context’, ‘managing customers’, and ‘marketing management/managing the marketing mix’ (see Table 2). Although some of these tasks are inherently more strategic than others, certain activities (e.g., brand management) also include a mix of strategic and operational tasks. Therefore, the classification scheme is not intended to reflect a clear continuum from strategic to operational activities. Furthermore, although areas of overlap exist between some of the activities, they did not cause allocation problems.

Overall, the ‘marketing strategy and business development and planning’ group was the most strategic in nature, including activities ranging from management of strategic initiatives, international development, and partnerships to portfolio development, market

segmentation, and project management. The ‘analyzing customers and context’ group emphasized the insights and research required to understand customers and the broader competitive and business environment. This set included activities related to data management, statistical analysis, and shopper research. In the ‘managing customers’ category, customer acquisition, development, and retention were central, with activities surrounding relationship management, CRM, and loyalty schemes. The ‘marketing management/managing the marketing mix’ group was sub-divided to include activities associated with managing the product/brand (e.g., brand planning, new product development), channel/trade and pricing (e.g., point-of-sale marketing, budget setting), and marketing communications (e.g., advertising, e-campaigns).

INSERT TABLE II HERE

Managerial survey results

The survey tested a preliminary marketing practices scale that, although not exhaustive in its range, encompasses a set of issues associated with the implementation of marketing and the associated activities. EFA was computed using principal components analysis with orthogonal VARIMAX rotation. The extracted factor solution suggested three factors as dimensions of marketing practice (Table II). Further results supported the retention of the three factors: the factors presented an alpha equal to or above 0.78 (the recommended threshold is 0.7), all items except “sales budgeting” presented high loadings with the respective factor, and the three factors provided a relevant significant amount of information that explained 67.66% of the total variance. Therefore, these factors represent an adequate solution for the marketing practice scale.

To test the goodness of fit of the proposed solution CFA was computed using maximum likelihood as the estimation procedure (see Table III). The general model’s fit

indexes indicate an acceptable fit. Although the chi-square value was significant, other measures (e.g., goodness-of-fit index [GFI], normed fit index [NFI], Tucker–Lewis index [TLI], and comparative fit index [CFI]) indicated that the model had a reasonable fit (i.e., measures had values close to or greater than 0.90). Convergent validity was also supported because all the estimates were significant ($p < 0.01$) and all indicators revealed acceptable values for individual reliabilities ($R^2 \geq 0.50$). In addition, the three sub-constructs showed high levels of composite reliabilities ($\rho \geq 0.7$) and displayed elevated values for the variance extracted ($VE \geq 0.5$). Discriminant validity was revealed because the squared correlations between each pair of sub-constructs produced a lower value than the respective variance extracted estimates (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

The empirically tested scale supported a tri-dimensional construct of marketing practice: segmentation and branding, business/marketing planning, and customer management. Dimension one, ‘segmentation and branding’, embodies strategic dimensions of marketing processes, such as segmenting, positioning and brand management. Marketing activities related to this sub-construct depict actions related to market targeting and focus and brand/product management or development. The second dimension, ‘business/marketing planning’, embraces marketing practice features related to planning activities. In particular, this sub-construct entails overarching items such as marketing and business planning and a more specific item on brand planning. The final dimension, ‘customer management’, embodies an articulated and continuous concern for the management of customers. This sub-construct involves service management and the establishment and management of long-term customer relationships.

INSERT TABLE III HERE

5. Discussion

In addressing the scope of marketing practice, this paper has examined the micro-level activities undertaken by marketers that collectively make up their practice. Overall, the findings reveal consistency among the different sources of data (textbooks, job advertisements, and survey). Common themes emerging from the disaggregated data include stakeholder and relationship marketing, customer analysis, marketing-mix management, and marketing planning, with all sources reflecting the centrality of customers to marketing practice. Such consistency becomes less clear when themes are integrated into broader categories of practice, with evidence that activities are parceled and prioritized in different ways by the different sources. These contrasts can be explained in two ways. Firstly, they reflect the variety of organizational activities that have a marketing dimension, and that not all activities are located within the marketing function. Although this issue was not within the scope of this study, they further reflect that not all aspects of marketing practice are carried out by marketers alone. Secondly, they illustrate that the perspectives of the sources are shaped by the interests of those responsible for them and those they serve.

In general, textbooks take a discrete, even disaggregated view of marketing activities, perhaps because their role is to present information in an accessible way or because their main focus is on marketers within the marketing function. Material from this documentary analysis views marketing as a process involving strategic and operational activities that firms implement. The activities or tasks associated with the marketing concept, with achieving a market orientation, with the marketing process, and with marketing management represent what is considered to be marketing practice. The textbook analysis is unclear about the extent to which a marketing activity must be enacted through the firm to be called a practice, but implies that marketing practice can be confined to the unit level, though both non-marketers and marketing personnel also should enact it more widely.

The job advertisements reflect a more integrated perspective on tasks, although this varies for different jobs. Many of the advertisements encompass activities that are strategically grounded, such as planning, business development, and international development and which presumably are which may not be carried out by marketers in isolation. Customer management or customer analysis were prominent features in many of the jobs, supporting the notion that marketing is responsible for managing the customer relationship on behalf of the organization and that these activities are central to marketing practice. The gathering and analysis of customer and market insight is also strongly featured in the advertisements. This finding aligns with Marketing Science Institute research priorities which question “How do you hire for insight and creativity” and around the novel pressures on marketers “... to interpret massive quantities of unstructured data and to turn them into actionable insights” (MSI, 2012). Finally, the job advertisements also covered a wide range of activities regarding marketing-mix practice. Overall, the advertisements seeking senior/strategic roles, such as business development, use more integrated descriptions of job activities than those for junior staff. Often, descriptions involve “wrapping” strategic and tactical job elements together, which makes the traditional distinction between these aspects less evident.

The managerial survey conceptualized marketing practice as a multi-dimensional construct, in which the sub-constructs entail the degree to which firms engage in marketing activities. The empirically-tested scale suggests that marketing practice involves the integration of a wide range of activities, supporting a tri-dimensional construct of marketing practice: segmentation and branding, business/marketing planning, and customer management. Overall, this source generated the most integrated view of which marketing activities comprise marketing practice, with strategic and operational elements included in each of the dimensions rather than appearing distinct and separate.

Although this investigation focuses on activities within marketing's jurisdiction, the distinction between functional and organizational-wide activities is clearly reflected in the findings. Specifically, marketing practice is shown as comprising two sets of activities: (i) those that usually are specific to marketing and which tend not to be carried out by other functional areas; (ii) activities that are more broadly applied across the organization and to which marketers (but also other organizational members) may contribute. For example, some marketing skills, such as brand management and the design of marketing communications, are specifically within the domain of professional marketers, the responsibility for other skills, such as customer service provision and the portrayal of brand identity, falls more broadly on organizational members. Though with different aims, textbooks and job adverts frame such marketing roles. Introductory marketing textbooks focus primarily on marketing activities. Although some of these books attempt to locate these activities within broader organizational practice, they more typically prioritize those occurring within the marketing function. Classified advertisements, which are usually prepared by human resources professionals, capture activities carried out by individuals who consider themselves as marketers within the function, as well as those which are of broader relevance to the organization and to which marketers contribute. Respondents to the managerial survey were marketing professionals, many of whom had studied for marketing qualifications. The marketing scale combines activities ranging from those which are more usually the domain of marketers within the marketing function, such as brand management and sales budgeting; to broader organizational activities to which marketers (and sometimes other organizational members) contribute, such as business planning and customer service management.

6. Conclusions

This study has examined the reach of marketing practice by uncovering the actual activities that marketing entails within firms. Results revealed the wide scope and diversity of marketing practice, ranging from tactical activities carried out within the marketing function or department, to contributions (both tactical and strategic) that were more widely spread through the organization. These strategic activities are akin to the notion of marketing as a series of firm-level processes and similar to the idea of pan-company marketing described by McDonald *et al.* (2000). By better clarifying marketing practice and its scope further refinements to empirical measurement instruments are enabled. These may be used to unravel the multi-level phenomenon of the relationship between practice and business performance (e.g., Reinartz *et al.*, 2004; Van Bruggen and Wierenga, 2005).

In addition, to fully capture marketing's contribution to the organization, research ought to examine its worth reflecting the breadth of the practice that was revealed in this study. Marketing practice, it seems, is both strategic and tactical; it is located within the marketing department as well as being widely spread throughout the organization; and, finally, although this study focuses on marketing professionals, marketing is also carried out by others within the firm. Thus the scope and influence of marketing occurs in distinctive forms that are different from practice in other functional areas of management. As a discipline, marketing ought when considering its value to the organization, to take into account that its contribution and practice is specific to the marketing function, yet is also present in other organizational-level activities.

A number of routes were used to develop a better empirical grounding and to test the theoretical validity of the activities associated with marketing practice. These routes acknowledge that understanding the scope and reach of marketing practice requires familiarisation with the context in which activities take place and the gathering of insights from those who undertake them. These requirements were satisfied by considering the span

and uniformity in how different sources view such practice. The question of consistency between sources is strategically important because greater convergence between how managers describe what they do and other descriptions of marketing practice might be associated with claims about the discipline's professionalism. If a relatively new functional profession such as marketing is to compete with more established specialties, it needs to develop a valid, empirical and stable classification of its own practice. Achieving this status can be particularly difficult when many other professions already claim legitimacy in related areas (Abbott, 1988).

7. Implications and future research

This study has implications for how marketing is practiced and taught and opens avenues for future research. Taking into consideration that marketing within an organization is not practiced by marketers alone, calls for a greater understanding about the value added by marketing as distinct from other functional areas and its broader contribution. This paper does not make claims about marketing activities which are undertaken by others in the organization, yet this topic deserves attention in its own right. This idea that marketers and others perform marketing tasks, unveils the area's distinctiveness from other functions and increases the complexity of codifying and measuring practice in the field. This has implications for the professionalization of marketing practice, which should not necessarily follow the same direction as for areas like accounting and HR. Creative research designs are needed to test the extent to which and the way that different organizational members contribute to marketing practice across a range of contexts.

Marketing teachers should be aware that textbooks present a more disaggregated view of marketing practice than that expressed by practitioners, who suggest a greater integration of marketing tasks and activities. Moreover, the emphasis is often on the activities carried out

by marketers within the marketing function, rather than on the broader organizational activities to which marketers and other organizational employees contribute. For example, the customer management theme although dominant in the quantitative study and job advertisements' analysis, was less apparent in the textbooks. Consequently, implications might exist in relation to marketing teaching not sufficiently reflecting the needs or activities of practitioners. Given existing concerns about the professionalism and jurisdiction of marketing, this disconnect might add to marketing academics' concerns about the status of marketing as a management function.

There is also room to investigate the relevance of academic research to practice and the role practice can play in informing such research (cf. Ford *et al.*, 2010; van Aken, 2005). Although limited data was collected with marketing academics/professors, findings suggest a gap in academics' understanding of marketing practice and how such understanding is reflected in teaching content and materials. Deeper consideration of the interplay between academic research in marketing practice and its influence in teaching content is warranted. In addition, while a broad examination of academic sources used at different levels of study was beyond the scope of this paper, it is necessary to understand these differences. Marketing professors reflected the need for "synergizing aspects of the marketing process" when teaching at a more advanced level. In general, MBA texts are more practice-based or focus more overtly on the marketing process, whereas introductory texts (as the ones used in this research) represent students' first encounter with academic sources detailing marketing practice. Comparing and contrasting the 'marketing as process' approach typical of many practice-based manuals with more traditional textbooks is a priority, given the former are more concerned with the contribution of marketing activities throughout the organization and with the context in which they occur.

Finally, although in-depth qualitative interviews with managers informed the content of the questionnaire used in this study, the survey method is recognized to provide a limited view of the nature and implementation of practice. Therefore there is scope for a programme of deeper qualitative content to supplement the findings reported here. Future research involving a series of in-depth interviews with marketing professionals as they go about their work, perhaps combined with managers keeping a daily diary of their activities, could shed further light on how and what these individuals actually do in the course of their jobs.

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Table I Review of marketing textbooks

Dibb <i>et al.</i> 2006 (UK)	Kotler <i>et al.</i> 2005 (UK)	Jobber 2004 (UK)	Kotler 2003 (US)	Pride and Ferrell 2003 (US)
<p>The Marketing Process: marketing opportunity & capability analyses, strategy development, devising marketing programs</p> <p>Marketing in Context: marketing strategy, competitive advantage, the marketing environment</p> <p>Understanding & Targeting Customers: consumer & B2B buying behaviour, segmenting markets, targeting & positioning, marketing research & MIS</p> <p>Marketing Mix Decisions: product decisions, branding & packaging, NPD & product portfolios, services; place, channels, wholesalers, distributors, physical distribution, retailing; promotion, marketing communications, advertising, PR, sponsorship, sales, sales promotion, the Internet, & DM; pricing concepts & setting.</p> <p>Marketing Management: marketing planning and forecasting, implementing strategies & measuring performance</p>	<p>The Marketing Process: analyses, strategy development, managing the marketing mix</p> <p>Understanding the Marketing Setting: marketing environment</p> <p>Understanding Markets: consumer & B2B, marketing research</p> <p>Core Strategy: segmentation & positioning, relationship marketing, competitive strategy</p> <p>Strategic Marketing: strategic planning; annual, long-range and strategic plans; marketing plans, marketing organization, marketing control.</p> <p>Marketing-Mix Development: product & brand strategy, NPD, services; pricing; promotion, advertising, sales promotion, PR, DM, IMC; place, managing channels</p>	<p>Marketing in the Firm: analysis of environment & capabilities, development and implementation of the marketing mix</p> <p>Fundamentals of Marketing: marketing planning, consumer and organizational buying behaviour, marketing environment, marketing research and MIS, market segmentation and positioning</p> <p>Competition & Marketing: analyzing competitors & creating competitive advantage; competitive marketing strategy</p> <p>Marketing-Mix Decisions: products, managing products, brands & corporate identity; new products, PLC & portfolios; pricing strategy; promotion, advertising, personal selling, sales management, DM, Internet marketing; distribution</p> <p>Marketing Implementation & Application: managing marketing implementation & control</p>	<p>Marketing Foundations: understand and define the market, focus on customer needs, create and implement integrated marketing programs, achieve profitability objectives</p> <p>Analyzing Marketing Opportunities: market-oriented strategic planning, information gathering & measuring demand, marketing environment, consumer & business buying behaviour, competition, market segments & target markets.</p> <p>Developing Market Strategies: positioning & differentiating, developing new market offerings.</p> <p>Shaping the Market Offering: Product & branding strategy, services, pricing strategies & programs</p> <p>Managing & Delivering Marketing Programs: Value networks & marketing channels, retailing, wholesaling & logistics, integrated marketing communications, advertising, sales promotion, PR & direct marketing, managing the sales force, managing total marketing effort</p>	<p>The Marketing Process: achieving satisfying exchanges with customers through marketing-mix activities, devised in response to a dynamic environment.</p> <p>Marketing and Its Environment: overview of strategic marketing, strategic planning, the marketing environment, social responsibility & ethics, international marketing.</p> <p>Buyer Behaviour & Target Market Selection: marketing research & MIS, target markets, segmentation and evaluation, consumer & B2B buying behaviour.</p> <p>Marketing Mix Decisions: product concepts, product development & management, branding & packaging, services, marketing channels & supply chain management, wholesaling, physical distribution & retailing, IMC, advertising & PR, personal selling & sales promotion, pricing concepts, and setting prices.</p> <p>Implementation: marketing implementation & control, marketing on the Internet, e-marketing.</p>

Table II Job groupings

Job Group	Tasks and Activities
Marketing strategy, business development and planning	Strategic/business development; overseeing strategic initiatives; international development; visioning; opportunity analysis; portfolio development; PLC management; business/marketing planning; building/managing partnerships and collaborative opportunities; overseeing marketing activities; market segmentation, targeting, and positioning, project management, team management
Analyzing customers and context	Consumer research/insight; business development insights; data management and analysis; brand/market analysis; data planning; developing targeting models; statistical analysis; managing data suppliers; performance measurement; competitive intelligence; panel data analysis; shopper research
Managing customers: customer acquisition and retention	Customer management; customer acquisition, development, and retention; relationship management; developing and implementing CRM; customer service/client management; loyalty marketing schemes
Marketing management/managing the marketing mix	Product/brand Brand management; brand strategy; brand planning; managing brand portfolio; brand innovation and development; product development (new/existing); product/brand marketing; brand communications; product launches
	Channel/trade and pricing Marketing management; managing the marketing mix; pricing; sales management; telesales; call center management; channel management; trade marketing; supplier/third-party liaison; store/branch marketing; point-of-sale marketing; retail space planning; category/range management; merchandising; packaging; designing brochures; managing the customer experience; setting budgets
	Marketing communications Marketing communications/IMC; managing marketing campaigns; media strategy and scheduling; account management; developing promotional materials; liaising with agencies; above the line (ABL), below the line (BTL), and through the line (TTL) communications; advertising; sales promotion; PR; sponsorship; display advertising; direct marketing/mailing; customer communication; internal communications; affinity marketing; affiliate marketing; online and e-campaigns; developing website content; managing Web traffic; copywriting; events, exhibitions, and conferences

Table III Dimensions of marketing practice

To what extent do you agree that your organization regularly undertakes the following ...	EFA Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Individual Reliability	Variable's t-value	Composite Reliability (ρ)	Variance Extracted
Segmentation and branding		0.89			0.88	0.71
Market segmentation	0.813		0.56	10.26		
New brand/product development	0.796		0.69	-		
Brand/product management	0.792		0.89	13.24		
Targeting customer groups	0.745		*	*		
Brand positioning	0.665		*	*		
Business/marketing planning		0.78			0.85	0.65
Marketing planning	0.848		0.83	-		
Business planning	0.753		0.60	10.08		
Brand planning	0.657		0.52	9.29		
Category planning	0.608		*	*	*	*
Sales budgeting	0.432		*	*	*	*
Customer management		0.82			0.85	0.74
Customer service management	0.879		0.70	9.33		
CRM and/or loyalty management	0.830		0.77	-		
Fit	$\chi^2 (p < 0.00000)$	<i>df</i>	GFI	NFI	NNFI/TLI	CFI
Model Fit	68.30	17	0.89	0.93	0.91	0.94

Notes: Respondents were asked to rate their assessment on a 5-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree; *Item removed after confirmatory factor analysis.