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INTRODUCTION:

SPECIAL ISSUE ON EXAMINING MARKETINGS’ UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

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Typically, firms engage in successful marketing activities with outcomes beneficial to both the firm and its various stakeholders. However, an increasing number of situations occur where successful marketing activities impact on stakeholders, such as consumers and society, in an unanticipated negative manner. While firms have focused on the financial benefit to the organisation (i.e. profits, competitive advantage) they have tended not to fully consider the total set of benefits and costs to all stakeholders involved in the wider exchange network. The dilemma and challenge for organisations in today's marketing environment is to not only produce profits and benefits for their shareholders, but also to manage their affairs in such a way that, at the very least, they are not detrimental to society (Abratt and Sacks 1988).

The traditional assumption is that voluntary exchange creates positive value, that is, a value chain. Exchanges may also result in negative outcomes, although such outcomes are not considered as a core part of the marketing exchange process. Negative unintended consequences may occur during any exchange transaction: parties may miscalculate the effect of their exchange on others; disregard the effect of their exchange due to self-interest; or may not have available market mechanisms to control the known effect (Mundt 1993). Part of the problem is that firms adopt an organisational perspective to evaluate the overall success of a marketing network, rather than considering what or how individual stakeholders evaluate exchange success. Thus, simple financial measures from a firm’s perspective fail to consider all
the approaches that stakeholders may evaluate outcomes (Wood and Jones 1995). This resulting mismatch of objectives and measures of success is important, especially when identifying and evaluating the unintended consequences of marketing activities. Increasing profit may not necessarily bring about an improvement in the communities’ quality of life. As such, marketers need to adopt broader perspectives to evaluate exchange networks that consider both value chains and harm chains (Polonsky et al. 2001).

It is against this background that the articles for this special issue of the Journal of Business Research were written. The selected articles cover a wide spectrum of ‘unintended’ marketing consequences and do not simply focus on firm-consumer, firm-consumer, or firm-society impacts. These serve to highlight the need to consider a wider set of relationships, ensuring both positive and negative potentials are considered.

Fontenot and Hyman examine the unintended consequences of marketing through the lens of anti-trust legislation and its implications for relationship marketing, which may serve to inhibit competition. Rarely is relationship marketing discussed in light of anti-trust implications, although there has been criticism that tight networks of firms such as Japanese Kirtsu’s are in fact anti-competitive. If relationships result in organizations substantially limiting competition or discriminating among different classes of distributors, they may violate anti-trust statutes as an unintended marketing consequence.

Desmond and Crane explore issues of morality in relation to the consequences of marketing action. These authors argue that marketing theory and practice is suffused with the morality of economic self-interest, which in turn has important
implications for the way the consequences of marketing action are interpreted as ‘intended’ or ‘unintended’.

Fuller and Ottman examine the impact of marketing decision making on ecosystems, specifically focusing on how sustainable product design can counter ecosystems degradation. They suggest that the natural capital conversions that underlie product making are a key source of the waste that in turn pollutes ecosystems. Thus more effective product design that fosters sustainability will assist in ensuring that new products are indeed less environmentally harmful.

Fullerton and Punj examine consumer misbehaviour as an unintended consequence of marketing activities, which seeks to promote a philosophy of increased consumption. These authors argue that consumer misbehaviour is a pervasive and integral element of the consumption experience with the ideology of consumption, sustained by the same marketing factors that define the consumption culture’s essential nature.

Hoek examines how changes to laws governing tobacco promotions have resulted in more subtle marketing campaigns that are arguably more appealing to vulnerable groups and thus undermines the intended object of tobacco marketing regulation. Unfortunately these subtle promotion techniques are more difficult to regulate, while at the same time are more effective in reaching those whom governments most wish to protect.

Lukas and Menon, like Fullerton and Ottoman, focus on the production of new products, but consider how increased speed in development may negatively affect product quality. Of particular concern are the unintended quality effects of dilatory NPD. Specifically, these authors address the questions: what can be done to ensure
superior quality from the new product’s first day on the market? And which factors deserve particular attention?

Murphy examines the extent to which problematic behaviours are likely to occur under high motivation to attain short-term goals within the sales industry. The organisations’ focus on implementing special incentives as a means to obtain commercial success may not only lead to the sales force employing unethical behaviours, but also the normalisation of these behaviours as a means of goal pursuit.

Oakenfull and Greenlea examine the consequences for mainstream marketers using different types of gay and lesbian imagery in mainstream advertising media, while counterbalancing the risk of backlash from heterosexual consumers’ negative attitudes towards homosexuals. These authors offer a direction to marketing practitioners as they attempt to target gay and lesbian consumers through mainstream media outlets while simultaneously not alienating heterosexual consumers.

O’Malley and Prothero examine how relationship marketing strategies pursued by organisations have led to a deterioration of consumers’ trust. Three main areas of concern these authors address include relational rhetoric employed by firms, the motives behind customer care and loyalty programs, and the use of marketing techniques considered to be intrusive and unacceptable.

Redmond examines the diffusion of innovations within society via the notion of interconnectivity. Interconnectivity occurs because marketers employ new communications technology for promotional purposes as a means of learning. Marketers compete by communication both about and through the new technologies, and in the act of competing marketers unintentionally affect the means by which individuals communicate.
The articles selected for this special issue represent a limited selection of a wide range of relationships yet to be considered under the unintended consequences of marketing microscope. This special issue has two goals:

- First, to provide a current perspective on a little considered area of marketing.
- Second, to stimulate discussion on the topic from differing perspectives.

Discussion of aspects of marketing generally not considered can only lead to progress. We hope that in reading this special issue this is achieved.

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