

LEARNING FROM THE PAST: FILLING THE HISTORICAL LITERACY VOID IN MARKETING CURRICULA

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Abstract

Why is historical literacy missing in the marketing curriculum? Ignoring academic wisdom from ancient times allows the history void to undermine student performance and pedagogical success. This exploratory study surveys the marketing course offerings at California State University (CSU) system campuses to confirm prior anecdotal evidence regarding the absence of marketing history courses. Building on a rich literature review, the role of historical literacy in learning is established from the original liberal arts through modern academic literacy standards. Antecedent marketing history and marketing education history research is extended to show that relevant, necessary, and sufficient knowledge exist to support historical literacy in the marketing curriculum. Following an analysis of CSU survey results, guidelines are presented to incorporate marketing history courses and competencies in undergraduate marketing curricula.

The History Void in Marketing Curricula

This paper examines the prevalence of a marketing history void in undergraduate marketing curricula at the campuses of the California State University (CSU) system. A search was conducted of the 2013 academic catalogues for each of the 22 separate CSU campuses (excluding the California Maritime Academy) to identify the types of undergraduate marketing course offerings. Using course offering descriptions as an indicator of content/discipline literacy, marketing curricula courses are classified according to the schools of marketing thought – including history. An analysis of the course classification patterns confirms the absence of marketing history in the entire CSU system, in contrast to every other school of marketing thought. Moreover, within courses, marketing history competency and skills are the least emphasized of all the schools of marketing thought.

The paper proceeds by first reviewing the literature on academic literacy with respect to history as well as the content/discipline literacy literature pertaining to marketing education. This literature review establishes a context for the significance of marketing history within the undergraduate marketing curricula. Next, the secondary data search of marketing course offerings at CSU campuses is described along with a discussion of course classification patterns. Lastly, the marketing history literature is synthesized into a “historiographic paradigm”

(Jones 1991) for gleaning best practices and to propose course designs that instill historical literacy as well as marketing history competency based skills.

Amazingly, the prolific marketing education history research does not appear to include a widespread empirical study. While the anecdotal evidence underlying most studies of marketing education history is likely to be consistent with empirical results, primary data on marketing curricular provides a pragmatic incentive for filling the marketing history void. Consequently, this study complements marketing education history literature, with a representative course inventory to confirm the history void in undergraduate marketing curricula.

Three hypotheses guide this study with operationalized statements for analysis:

1. Does a historical literacy void exist in undergraduate marketing curricula?
 - How many CSU campuses offer marketing history courses, or explicit historical content?
2. How well do the marketing course offerings address discipline/content-specific literacies, including historical literacy?
 - What is the frequency pattern of CSU marketing courses with relevant content for each school of marketing thought?
3. What is the dominant logic that characterizes the marketing curriculum?
 - Does the array of CSU marketing courses have a core academic purpose?

Analyzing CSU Marketing Course Patterns

Owing to the comprehensive quality of this data set, a wide variety of marketing curricula patterns exist for analysis. In that regard, the course inventory can facilitate ongoing and wide ranging marketing education discussion – some unrelated to marketing history literacy. However, the focus of this study is to confirm the empirical existence of a marketing history void.

Historical Literacy Void

Returning to the research hypotheses guiding this study, the CSU marketing course sample conclusively confirms the existence of a historical literacy void in undergraduate marketing curricula. None of the CSU marketing curriculum offerings included a marketing history course and no courses offered included a description that mentions marketing history or historical perspective content/methods. Although the CSU course offerings reveal a dearth in other marketing competencies such as decision making/analytics, as well as macro/societal and multicultural marketing, marketing history is the only competency that is entirely omitted.

History's Discipline-Specific Value

When the CSU course offerings are mapped onto a typology of marketing schools of thought (Shaw & Jones 2005), the history void becomes more apparent. A table of survey responses illustrates these tendencies and shows the courses with the greatest potential for mitigating the absence of history (historical school), in addition to the representation of other schools of thoughts in the undergraduate marketing curriculum. The shaded courses do not presently address the respective school of thought. The pervasive pattern shows that all of the schools of thought are fully addressed by marketing curriculum courses, except history (one course) – followed by the macromarketing and systems/analytics schools of thought.

History's Academic Learning Validity

Besides omitting historical literacy and the rich academic resources generated by the historical school of thought, the marketing course offerings are skewed towards discipline-specific course content – often with a completely topical focus. The role of history, theory and academic/liberal arts literacies which are most fundamental for academic learning appears to be diminished in favor of course content reflecting contemporary marketplace trends. Consequently, embedding historical literacy in the marketing curriculum would provide the theoretical and academic mooring to improve the coherence and continuity of course offerings.

Recommendations for Filling the Marketing History Void

Rather than offer entirely new proposals, the guidelines recommended here synthesize earlier directives for increasing the marketing history presence in undergraduate marketing curricula.

“The general purpose of this article is to provide a justification for the establishment of a historical orientation across the undergraduate marketing curriculum and recommendations for implementation to provide pedagogical structure and ‘ingredients’ for marketing educators.” (Petkus 2010, p. 64)

In particular, this study recommends three initiatives to fill the marketing history void:

1. *Pursue a twofold pedagogical structure.*

Historical literacy can be imparted as a topical ingredient within existing marketing course offerings, as well as through a general historical perspective that specifies contextual matter, meanings, methods, and measures.

2. *Build instructor awareness and consensus.*

Marketing educators are the most informative and influential agents for addressing the historical literacy void. Academic associations like the Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing (CHARM) are a great resource for instructors to learn and further historical literacy in the marketing curriculum.

3. *Innovate marketing history course design and delivery (“old wine in new bottles”).*

Modern educational trends can benefit the breadth of historical topics (“stories”) and deepen historical perspectives (“skills”). Historical literacy can be linked to curricular assessment standards for critical thinking, verbal skills, and information competency. Historical aptitude can be immersed in interactive digital applications.

Conclusion: The Time for Action Has Come

The validity of historical literacy cannot be denied. The ancient Greek and Renaissance liberal arts tradition extolls the integral role of history in academic learning. Historians have demonstrated the merit of historical study as well as historiography methods in the academic curriculum – including business and marketing programs. Historical knowledge can cohere and catalyze learning of across the academic literacies that comprise current university curricula. Marketing history scholars have compiled an extensive scholarly, strategic, and scholastic literature to support historical literacy within the marketing curriculum. Moreover, marketing education scholars have made the case for designing courses and content which contain an historical perspective. The time for advocacy has passed. The time for action has come.

References available upon request