Introduction

Every two years, the Marketing Science Institute asks every MSI member company Trustee to provide input to help set priorities for the research that will guide our activities for the next few years.

These priorities enable the Marketing Science Institute to engage in its most critical mission: moving the needle on important marketing problems. They help determine the conferences and workshops we hold, the research competitions we host, the new knowledge generation initiatives we sponsor, and the content we develop and disseminate. They influence the work of scholars all over the world, informing the academic community about the most pressing research needs and interests of our member companies.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

The 2016–2018 research priorities are the result of a multi-stage process. First, we invited all member company Trustees, current and past Academic Trustees, Executive Directors, and Young Scholars to identify pressing marketing challenges and critical issues for the future. We asked them first to identify: “Big pressing issues for the next 2–5 years (if we knew more, I could be more effective),” and then to consider “Issues that we may not be thinking about now, that will emerge as critical for marketing in the next decade.”

To gain additional insights, we held two member regional meetings, one in San Francisco and one in Philadelphia, and convened industry-focused work groups at the November 2015 Trustees meeting in Phoenix. This “raw data” was then analyzed and combined into the final ballot which was sent out to all Trustees.

We approached the final ballot in a new way. In addition to asking Trustees to rank the broad topics identified in discussions with our member companies, we asked them to consider the very rich and specific comments that also emerged in those discussions.

By asking our Trustees to select those statements or questions that most resonate with their experience, we aimed to capture the “voices” of those making important decisions about marketing today. We received a great response from our member companies, with input from almost every member company in the multi-stage process, providing a strong mandate for the resulting key priorities you see here.

RESULTS

In the pages that follow, you will find our top five 2016–2018 research priorities. In the priorities, we have tried to retain the voice of the members that we heard throughout the process. Within each topic, we have also included Trustees’ comments and questions that we hope add depth and richness to the research priority. The 2016–2018 research priorities are followed on page 17 by “On the Horizon”: a small set of provocative questions that emerged when we asked our Trustees to imagine critical issues emerging in the not-too-distant marketing future.

HOW TO USE THESE PRIORITIES

Member companies:

Please let us know what would be most helpful to you in bringing these priorities “to life.”

- Would you like to see a new knowledge generation initiative? A small focused workshop?
- A hands-on learning opportunity?
- An entire Trustees meeting?
- A topical conference?
- A research competition?
Collaborating with academic scholars to help gain new insights?

What would be most helpful to you in helping your organization address these pressing marketing challenges?

Academic scholars:
Please consider focusing your research efforts on these important issues. For the 2016–2018 research priorities,

- MSI is looking forward to funding research on these topics.
- We are also interested in potential research competitions and new knowledge generation initiatives in each of these areas.
- We hope to foster collaborations between our member companies and scholars working on these topics.
- As knowledge emerges, we expect to hold focused conferences and workshops on these topics, and it would be great to see special issues of journals focused on these topics as well.
- MSI welcomes your working papers, whether or not we have funded the research. MSI is also very interested in articles that synthesize our knowledge and understanding in these key areas.
- We are particularly interested in multidisciplinary research, and we are open to researchers from outside of marketing working on these important topics.
- Please think of MSI as a partner and collaborator in your research efforts to move the needle forward on these key issues.

For those issues “on the horizon,” MSI is very interested in conceptual thinking and “early insights” in these emerging areas. We clearly expect that some of these issues may become research priorities in the future, and we see this as an opportunity to gain some glimpses of what’s coming.

For more information on receiving support from MSI and collaborating with MSI, please visit www.msi.org.

Dig in! Get to work! I look forward to hearing from you.

Kay Lemon
Executive Director, MSI, 2015–2017
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For information on obtaining research support and submitting a working paper to MSI, go to the Research section of www.msi.org.

Contact us at research@msi.org with questions about research priorities and programs.
1. Quantitative models to understand causality, levers, and influence in a complex world

2. Delivering integrated, real-time, relevant experiences in context

3. Making sense of changing decision process(es)

4. New data, new methods, and new skills — how to bring it all together?

5. Innovation, design, and strategy in an age of disruption
Quantitative models to understand causality, levers, and influence in a complex world

Individuals and organizations interact through many channels, on multiple screens and devices, across a myriad of touchpoints and over time. Given the ubiquity of data, there is a new opportunity for firms to more fully understand the effect and value of their marketing actions. Big data, experimentation, and new models enable us to gain new insight into the causal levers and influences in this complex, extended world. Significant research is needed to develop better models that enable causal inference.

Topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Improving** multi-touch attribution, marketing mix, and ROI models — across all media, digital and non-digital
- **Understanding** “omni-screen” and “omni-channel” drivers of customer decisionmaking and behavior
- **How** can we efficiently and effectively detect signal versus noise in big data, and eliminate extraneous data?
- **Identifying** the critical paths to purchase in B2B environments using causal models
- **Understanding and measuring** the impact of creative — incorporating creative in causal models
- **Given** the enormous amount of data firms now have, are shorter time periods sufficient for causal inference?
- **Identifying** what we can do to drive behavioral change versus identifying a change wave that we are simply riding (i.e., not caused by our marketing actions)
“#1 priority is attribution!”

“We need improvements to ROI modelling that more accurately identify and quantify impact from various digital efforts.”

“We need to understand the effects of synergies across touchpoints — paid, owned, and earned. Current advanced analytics is providing learning and ROI on contribution to sales for each touchpoint, but is not taking synergies into consideration.”

“How can you measure creative quality in real time?”

“We need to develop ‘deep learning’ (machine learning) methods; applications of deep learning methodology will be required to solve the most important marketing problems. When do traditional MMM or attribution models work better, and where does deep learning work best?”

“There is a lot of unrealized potential in the field experiment approach, where different levels of a marketing activity (or different activities) are employed (along with a control condition) and both immediate and long-term effects are tracked.”

“There are key tradeoffs between models that are focused on big important problems with many variables — sometimes hundreds — and the models we often see in the literature that are based on a handful of variables. These tradeoffs require a focus on important issues, an acceptance that we’ll never get pure causality, and a willingness to be approximately right on less essential issues.”
Delivering integrated, real-time, relevant experiences in context

Consumers are increasingly in control of the information flow. And marketers now have the ability to customize experiences, offers, and content. Thus, the issue of getting marketing “right” in real time emerged as a critical priority for our members, whether B2B or B2C. This priority focuses on how firms should design and serve up their offerings in real time so that they are relevant in context — hitting just the right “notes” at the right point in the path to purchase or decision journey.

These issues are complex and unwieldy, and will necessitate new integrative approaches to customer insight and marketing actions. For example:

- **Just-in-time** information feeding: how to provide the right information at the right time in the right context to the right individual

- **How** do firms provide information that consumers want to receive or even seek out? How do you get customers to initiate contact with the firm — to signal that they are interested? How do you build brand/product awareness in a post-TV advertising world?

- **How** can B2B firms be there in real time with the content that potential customers want?

- **How** do you design the firm’s digital and physical offerings and messages to optimally reach and engage customers at every touchpoint? How do you interact and engage and adapt in a continuous manner across the customer journey?

- **How** to provide real-time and relevant nudges to overcome decision inertia

- **How** important are seamless and integrated customer experiences? What are the “moments that matter” in decisionmaking? How can we understand — and perhaps influence — the periphery in which these moments are embedded?
“The 1+1=3 is **optimizing content** within context.”

“All marketing is pull, **no more push**. Consumer controls all information flow, company is invited to react.”

“What content needs to be **personalized** and what doesn’t?”

“How to develop **tailored content** using individual insights and automated campaign management”

“What does it take to **change awareness now**? How to reach Gen Z and Millennials and stay relevant?”

“With digital channels reducing the economic viability of traditional media and privacy concerns and ad blocking potentially reducing the **efficacy of digital channels**, what are the implications and alternatives for marketers in the future?”

“What touchpoints (or mix of touchpoints) are the primary contributors/shapers of customer experience? How can marketers ensure they are **focusing on experiences** that their customers want them to be excellent at? What is the value of providing a consistent experience?”

“Best ways to evolve to easily and quickly **creating relevant digital experiences**, ensuring experiences are simple, injecting innovation, moving toward personalizing experiences without being creepy, how to be fast and yet assure data privacy and appropriateness, building customer trust in this environment, and leveraging and chunking content effectively.”

“As consumers are **increasingly taking control** of their own information flow it is becoming increasingly important to understand how and why they seek out information. Rather than telling consumers what to attend to and feeding them marketing messages, managers must inspire curiosity about their offerings so that consumers actually want to learn about and interact with their products and brands.”
Making sense of changing decision process(es)

Key questions arise about how decision processes may be changing, given that customers are now always connected and have more choice in what they attend to. Customers are now engaging with firms through complex journeys and paths to purchase and beyond. What are the opportunities for firms to (somehow) insert themselves—or their product or service—into the customer decision process at the right time in the right context to have an influence?

Below, we first highlight topics and questions that relate to behavioral science and decision processes in all customer environments—from complex decision processes in business-to-business contexts, to dynamic decision processes in service environments, to simple, habitual decisions in consumer/shopper environments. We then highlight questions and issues that arose specifically for consumer decision making and for business-to-business decision making.

ALL TYPES OF DECISION MAKING

► **How** are fragmentation of attention and digital distraction influencing motivation, involvement, and decisionmaking?

► **How** do we trade off privacy concerns versus the benefits of personalization, sharing data versus convenience, customization versus intrusion, annoyance versus effectiveness? What is the role of trust and authenticity in digital environments?

► **How** does mobile change decision making and behavior? What is the impact of mobile on: search, networks, choice, behavior, the overall journey/path to purchase—and specific contexts such as complex decisions, finance, health, pricing, and payment?
How is brand consideration and evaluation different in multi-channel environments or on different devices or screens? How do we know when the frame of reference for consumers is changing in a way that reshapes how they view a brand?

Understanding how customers deal with large amounts of ubiquitous information about everything. We need more research on decision simplification heuristics and processing patterns, given this overwhelming amount of information and stimuli.

To what extent do customer perceptions and experiences spill over from one domain or context to another? Does a customer’s experience with a provider in an unrelated category influence their expectations of and experience with your brand?

“Do the old rules (e.g., creating awareness, interest, desire, and action) still hold? If yes, then what is the best way to achieve these goals in this time of fragmentation and not having a viewer as a passive hostage? If no, then what are the new rules?”

“A growing issue is potential backlash to intrusion. What is the cost of annoying people? There may soon be increasing limits placed on firms (in the US) to increase consumers’ privacy (as in Europe).”

“As multiscreen measurement becomes commonplace and mobile ad exchanges more prevalent, there needs to be research into the right balance between intrusion and effectiveness while allowing consumers to protect their privacy.”

“How can we better understand the real competitive context in our customers’ minds? Not just competitive companies or brands, but what do they see as their real/evaluated choice set?”
CONSUMER DECISION MAKING

► **What** is the science of emotion in the digital, mobile, always on, and always connected age? What is the role of emotions in experience? How do we design customer experiences that lead to maximal enjoyment, happiness, and utility?

► **How** marketing can drive positive change in behavior: new approaches to help consumers make “good” decisions and “smarter choices.” What interventions can be deployed to generate (break) healthy (unhealthy) habits? How can behavioral economics be applied to drive adherence?

► **How** does engaging in technology change consumers? How does it influence emotions, decision making, and behavior?

► **Understanding** cultural, generational, and life stage differences in perceptions about new and existing brands

► **How** are wearables, monitoring devices, and biometrics changing decision making and behavior?

“Just because we can, does that mean we should? What are the **ethics of nudging**?”

“Understanding the importance of strong emotional connection to build brands, and how **personalization** can allow for different positionings of a brand based upon the consumer/customer journey”

“How do life stage differences, generational issues, and culture influence decision processes and **path to purchase**?”

“Anonymous online interactions will no longer be anonymous. Text patterns, portfolio of installed apps, browsing behavior will all come together to provide **digital fingerprints**. How do marketers leverage these digital fingerprints for effective communication while balancing privacy and intrusive content?”

“How can we take a less transactional perspective on ‘shoppers’ and ‘consumers’ and think of **people as people** and gain deep consumer insights and understanding?”
B2B DECISION MAKING

► How have digital and inbound changed the way people process information and make buying decisions, especially for complex decisions in business markets?

► Given the extent to which customers can search for information on their own, do we need to change the way we market to and sell to knowledgeable customers? Can we shorten the selling cycle?

► How is the purchase cycle influenced by aspects of joint decision making and committee decision making? What is the influence of others in such joint decision making? What is the path to purchase and what are the most appropriate marketing levers?

► How is digital transforming the traditional sales model for B2B products and services? How does digitization influence how decision makers use their time and how they value their time?

“What is the impact of emotion on group decisionmaking, especially in B2B? Emotion is highly influential in individual decision making — how does this change in a group dynamic? How is such decision-making influenced by size of group?”

“How do we quantify the ROI of creating intellectual value in B2B? What impact does content/intellectual value have on loyalty? How does it impact the buying process?”

“For B2B, how to make your customer a hero to THEIR customers?”

“As health care delivery becomes more integrated and value-based, how will the provider buying process change and what are the implications for providers? Also, as consumerism takes hold in health care, how will expectations of the patient experience shift (e.g., digital, across the ecosystem, disruptors, new delivery channels like retail)?”
New data, new methods, and new skills — how to bring it all together?

The rapid change in marketing can best be seen in the plethora of new types of data and new analytic approaches to gain insights. This priority focuses on the need to develop new approaches that enable firms to gain insights from multiple approaches, to synthesize, to bring together disparate methods to drive action. There is also a sense that the old methods aren’t working as well, and that some of the traditional indicators and metrics are less effective.

This priority focuses on integration, new methods, and new skill sets needed; specifically, here are some topics that illustrate where significant research is needed:

- **How** to bring multiple sources and types of information together to gain insight and to make better decisions (e.g., big data meets unstructured data; data scientist meets anthropologist). Can such synthesis be automated?

- **Integrating** behavioral theory and marketing frameworks into big data marketing

- **How** can firms speed up the process by which they collect data, synthesize, identify insights, take action, get feedback, and do any necessary course correction? Is this process different for B2B and B2C?

- **New** approaches and sources of data — what are the roles of neuroscience, artificial intelligence, cognitive computing, machine learning?

- **Integrating** big data analysis with managerial decision making; identifying the tradeoffs between managerial judgement and insights from consumers/customers — how to compare and contrast big data-driven insights versus managerial heuristics-driven insights — how has this evolved from the early work from several decades ago?

- **How** best to gain insights and to disseminate insights, now that responsibility for — and access to data about — the customer experience is democratized across the organization?
How can organizations facilitate managerial understanding of these new, complex approaches?

Developing new skills around data (and insight) visualization, narrative, storytelling, and creativity

What is the role of creativity in integrating and synthesizing insights across approaches?

“What methods can be used to make real-time decisions in a data-rich environment? What are scalable methods to analyze large amounts of data (in real time)?”

“How do we merge the discrepancies between traditional methods and what big data is actually telling us?”

“What significant insights are gained through big data? Why are we so poor at gaining insights from big data?”

“How to evolve traditional expensive qualitative methods to faster and agile consumer/customer “pulse reads” that can lead to better and faster insights. Especially, how to read marketing levers real time, including emerging touchpoints; and the agility/ability to change plan given real-time learning.”

“How do we get management to understand, or embrace, these new opportunities, when we still struggle to get them to make optimal decisions based on the research we’ve been providing?”

“The real breakthroughs come from the combination of analytics and qualitative insights.”

“How will cognitive computing capabilities change marketing over the next decade?”

“Analytics are important, but very often the analyses lack frameworks. Marketing can provide many valuable frameworks including a consumer-behavior funnel, strategic positioning, and a focus on solving customer needs.”

“The end of marketing research as we know it”
Innovation, design, and strategy in an age of disruption

Given the disruption and change in marketing and in markets, members placed significant emphasis on the topics of innovation, design, and strategy. In particular, new knowledge and new models are needed in the area of innovation: designing, developing, and bringing new products, services, and experiences to market. In addition, members are seeking new approaches to enable them to forecast, identify, and respond to market disruption. For example:

INNOVATION AND DESIGN

- **New** models for innovation and product development in the age of big data and analytics. Systematically evaluating successful innovation using quantitative tools. Putting more science in innovation.

- **Understanding** the role of aesthetics and design in innovation, new product development, and experience design. How can we bring design thinking into marketing?

- **Developing** better predictive tools that are effective at various stages of development

- **How** to design stores and channels that are shopper centric. What will the in-store experience be, given the digitized consumer?

- **How** to design complex service offerings that are effective, efficient, and resilient to service failures

- **How** to develop and market ideas and experiences rather than products or services
“Faster methods for test and learn. Better forecasting methods that take into consideration the disruptive effect of technology.”

“How to project the future effectively to get tangible, actionable insights to develop products with 5–10 year development cycles.”

“Wearables: soon it’s going to be in you or on you. How will this impact marketing, design and development?”

“What is the architecture of launching new brands in today’s environment?”

“What is the role of marketing when the technology becomes invisible, versus right now, where the technology is front and center?”

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**STRATEGY**

► **Fragmentation** of value: Is what constitutes “value” in the eyes of the customer changing?

► **Identifying** and understanding new entrants and nontraditional companies as competitors

► **Identifying** faster ways to spot the next generation business models (e.g., sharing/collaboration economy, crowd sourced models) — how to see them on the horizon

► **What** drives trust in disruptors?

► **How** do you anticipate market disruption? How do you learn and adapt more quickly?

► **How** insights from emerging markets may enable faster identification of potential disruptors
How should big firms respond to disruptive business models? How do big firms stay relevant? How do big brands fight against being “too big” in customers’ minds? How do big firms maintain trust? Survival and growth in an age where known brands are often less enticing than unknown brands.

“Which industries are ready to be disrupted?”

“Will consumers become comfortable with crowd sourced service providers as the predominant (versus marginal) model?”

“Paradox of complete trust of unknowns and complete distrust of known brands. How do big brands compete with little brands? Should they launch little brands? What are the drivers of distrust for big brands? How can a brand be real and authentic?”

“There appears to be a greater proclivity to try new brands in the U.S., in contrast to developing areas. What are the cultural differences in what drives trust?”

“What will laser-focused targeting do to companies? Does it create a more level playing field for all companies? Will this benefit small companies and hurt big companies?”

“How do we ‘future-proof’ our brand?”
ON THE HORIZON

SEVEN QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

“How will the scope and definition of what is now called ‘Marketing’ most likely change over the next decade?”

“What is the role of humans in a world of smart machines?”

“Should consumers’ personal information be allowed to be the ‘future currency’ or should/will companies be forced to constrain their data gathering and sharing more narrowly? Will data rights and the value therein be the next area of disruption?”

“How will we ‘reach’ the marketplace in the future?”

“What is the future of retail over the next 10 years? What will be the role of brick and mortar?”

“How will water, as a limited resource, impact marketing (and customers) in the future?”

“Should brands take stands? What is marketing’s role as a driver/enabler of social change?”
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Juanjuan Zhang, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

2009
Nidhi Agrawal, Northwestern University
On Anir, University of California, San Diego
Anocha Ariyaratne, University of Michigan
Simona Battiti, London Business School
Hai Che, University of Southern California
Amar Cheema, Washington State University
Xinlei (Jack) Chen, University of British Columbia
Martijn G. de Jong, Erasmus University
Rex (Yuxing) Du, University of Georgia
Taras Geylani, University of Pittsburgh
Liang Guo, University of Angers
Dmitrii Kuksov, Washington University
Shiba Li, Indiana State University
Noah Lim, University of Houston
Himanshu Mishra, University of Utah
Debanjan (Deb) Mitra, University of Florida
Anirban Mukhopadhyay, University of Michigan
Leif Nelson, University of California, San Diego
Sharon Ng, Nanyang Technological University
Michael I. Norton, Harvard University
Vanessa M. Patrick, University of Georgia
Derek D. Rucker, Northwestern University
Anirban Roy, University of Illinois
Deborah A. Small, University of Pennsylvania
Stefano Puntoni, Erasmus University – Rotterdam School of Management

2008
Amar Cheema, Washington State University
Hai Che, University of Southern California
Oded Netzer, Columbia University
Robert Zeithammer, University of Calgary

2007
Aswin Panhala, University of Pennsylvania
Zakary Tormala, Cornell University
Manoj Thomas, Harvard University
Berk Atman, Erasmus University – Rotterdam School of Management
Paulo Albuquerque, University of Rochester
Mhairi Birtles, Singapore Management University
Amar Cheema, Washington State University
Hai Che, University of Southern California
Oded Netzer, Columbia University
Robert Zeithammer, University of Calgary