

## Reply

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I am grateful for this opportunity to reply to Professor Della Bitta's comments and further thoughts on my assessment of consumer behavior discipline.

First of all, I am very much impressed with the substance and style of Professor Della Bitta's comments. He has very correctly summarized my viewpoints; he has very nicely organized his comments and further thoughts in terms of five key issues; and above all, he has presented his ideas with the professionalism of a scholar.

At the same time, it does not mean that I agree with all of his comments. Let me respond, hopefully in an equally professional manner, to each of his five comments and further thoughts.

### Shortages Yes, but Surpluses?

There is no question that I have deliberately taken an exaggerated position to express my dissatisfaction with the undue attention we have paid to the rational decision-making process with which individual consumers choose brands in general, and the multiattribute attitude models (cognitive psychology) in particular.

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evaluations by the same set of gate keepers, the more we are likely to generate "publish or perish" syndrome: Young scholars will simply play the game and publish in the prestigious journals not so much out of their own convictions, but more out of what will please the editorial board.

Finally, a good indicator of the existence of zero sum game is to examine the degree of readership alienation for our prestigious journals in marketing. Only a handful of scholars and practitioners tend to subscribe to these journals, fewer of them read them regularly, and fewer still find more than one or two papers interesting or relevant. It would appear that our journals are performing more and more the function of providing the seat of approval to one's scholarship and less and less satisfying the needs of discipline and its practitioners.

#### On Interrelated Dimensions

Professor Della Bitta makes an excellent point that unless the complexity of interaction effects of focus, process and purpose dimensions are recognized, we may be throwing away the baby with the bathwater. While I agree with the basic statement, let me respond with the following two comments.

First of all, we may be throwing away only parts of the baby and not the full baby depending upon whether or not the interaction effects stigmatize any systematic variance in the phenomenon. Furthermore, whether the parts of the baby inadvertently discarded are vital parts or not will depend upon the dominance of main effects vis-a-vis interaction effects. In my opinion, the main effects of each dimension are far more dominant than interaction effects. Therefore, they were ignored in the analysis as presented in the original paper. However, this is certainly a debatable point and needs to be investigated further.

Second, the specific example of how advertising works needing greater theoretical rather than empirical knowledge is not inconsistent with earlier discouragement of utilizing individual decision-making (cognitive psychology) framework. In fact, I am consciously suggesting that we look for other frameworks than the hierarchy of effects model (based on principles of attitude change leading to behavior change) because much of how advertising works is really a function of other mechanisms such as reminder, reinforcement,

"One might argue that it is appropriate to propose an area of investigation has received enough attention when other areas in the discipline are in much greater need of study. This might be valid under constraining conditions of a zero sum game where scholarly activity can only be devoted to one area if it is redirected from another. . . . This does not appear to describe present conditions in the consumer behavior field."

It is the last statement with which I disagree. I do believe that it is a zero sum game and that we have some real resource constraints which channel our theory and research efforts in areas of less relevance at the neglect of other more relevant aspects of consumer behavior. Let me attempt to enumerate these resource constraints.

First, we have only a handful of scholars in consumer behavior. While this is not atypical of our discipline as compared to other disciplines, the fact remains that no more than forty to fifty scholars out of thousands seem to emerge as opinion leaders in the field. This is evidenced by the frequency of their publications and more importantly by the citations of their published research papers and books. In fact, I am willing to venture that the skewness of scholarship is worse than the famous twenty-eighty ratio!

Second, we literally have very few journals where one can publish consumer behavior theory. In fact, most marketing journals have actively discouraged publications of any good theory of consumer behavior except perhaps *Journal of Marketing*. Not surprisingly, most of the often cited theories of consumer behavior have been published in proceedings, textbooks or research books.

Third, we have a very narrow group of gate keepers in the form of editorial boards of marketing journals. They tend to be narrow with respect to both the numbers and the viewpoints. A quick look at the names of the scholars on the editorial boards of our journals clearly indicates that it is the same set of people continued for many years. Worse yet, similar to the interlocking directorships of corporations, we also tend to have interlocking editorial board membership. The consequence is that if a prospective author has any new theory or research which does not suit the professional and often personal views of this handful of scholars, it is virtually impossible to get a publication in the journals. I am willing to bet that every aspiring young scholar has a "horror story" to tell in this regard.

Unfortunately, as more and more tenure and promotions decisions rest on publications in these journals as well as on outside

attempt at looking at the future developments in consumer behavior, I did suggest that we are likely to generate standardized measures of agreed upon constructs unique to consumer behavior such as brand loyalty, brand preferences, store patronage and consumption styles (Sheth 1972). Unfortunately, this need has not been fulfilled to the extent predicted, partly because of continued borrowings from other disciplines.

#### On Justice

While I sympathize with Professor Della Bitta's view that we should master our own destiny, I am not as optimistic. Unfortunately, there are too many external factors which inhibit one to master his own destiny as a scholar in consumer behavior. These include: (a) The gatekeeping function performed by a handful of scholars in the field; (b) lack of avenues to publish nontraditional or controversial research; (c) capidity with which most tenure decisions are made in the third or fourth year of teaching and research; and (d) attractive consulting and career opportunities in the professional world of marketing practice.

I do agree that we should try our best to balance the power of these external factors. It is precisely for this reason that I agreed to start a new annual series (*Research in Marketing*) which encourages scholars to focus on innovative and nontraditional research thinking.

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epistemic and even incidental learning rather than the traditional persuasion mechanism prevalent in mass communication theories (Sheth 1974, 1979).

#### On Borrowing

It seems that I have failed to communicate my true feelings on the issue of borrowing constructs and theories from other disciplines. I am not opposed to borrowing from other disciplines so long as the following two conditions are met. First, let's make sure that we borrow by working backwards from our problems and concerns to all other disciplines of social and physical sciences rather than forcing a construct or theory of a specific discipline designed for its unique setting or concern onto our area. Unfortunately, the past experiences of borrowings have been consistently and overwhelmingly indicative of the latter process. Consequently, we have often looked like the "Tom Swift and his Electronic Machine" with respect to methodological, theoretical and instrumental borrowings. Examples of this type of borrowings clearly include personality theory, operations research (linear programming and Markov chains), attitude models, motivation research, multivariate techniques, and scaling methods.

Second, let's make sure that we obtain good training and expertise in the disciplines we borrow from. Lack of such expertise is most commonly evident in the textbooks of consumer behavior as well as in many methodological publications in scholarly journals. The latter is especially true with respect to utilization of multivariate techniques.

It is, therefore, not surprising to encounter statisticians, sociologists, economists, psychologists, and survey researchers who are concerned, amused or angry at us because we have either misapplied their concepts and methods or ignored their caveats.

I also feel that we should borrow with greater deliberation and long term commitment. Unfortunately, life cycles of most of our past borrowings remarkably resemble those of fads and fashions.

#### On Measurement

I fully agree with Professor Della Bitta that we need to look at our measurements or rules of correspondence (definition and scaling) between the constructs and their corresponding reality. In an earlier

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAGDISH N. SHETH is Walter H. Steinhilber Distinguished Professor of Marketing and Research Professor at the University of Illinois. He has also been on the faculty of Columbia University and M.I.T. He was Albert Frey Visiting Professor of Marketing at University of Pittsburgh between May and December 1974. Dr. Sheth has published more than a hundred papers in scholarly journals in the areas of consumer psychology, multivariate methods and multinational marketing. He is a co-author of *The Theory of Buyer Behavior* (with J. A. Howard), and a co-editor of FOUR volumes of *International Business Operations* (with S. P. Sethi), *Marketing Analysis for Societal Problems* (with Peter Wright), and *Consumer and Industrial Buying Behavior* (with Arch Woodside and Peter Bennett). He has also edited *Models of Buyer Behavior and Multivariate Methods for Market and Survey Research*. In a recent survey of other marketing professors, Dr. Sheth was rated as among the top ten marketing professors in the country. His book on Theory of Buyer Behavior and a paper on attitude research are among the top three most cited publications in marketing. Dr. Sheth was also awarded the Viktor Malaja Medal in 1979 by the Austrian Research Society in Vienna for his contributions in advertising and consumer research.