



## Consistently diverse

Cross-functional approaches and relationships guide and inform **Professor Victoria Crittenden's** wide-ranging interests

### Firstly, what led to your interest in marketing?

I recently interviewed the Chief Marketing Officer for a large corporation. When asked a similar question, she described an interest in marketing that went all the way back to her first Barbie doll, which sparked her interest in fashion and retailing. She also talked about considering psychology as a college major because of her interest in people and what influences them. I do not, however, have that longevity of interest in marketing. I only took one marketing course in my undergraduate programme and one in my MBA – neither of which encouraged my interest. Rather, when considering a doctoral programme, I knew that I had a strong interest in finance and strategy.

I read articles published in finance journals and realized very quickly that I did not want to spend the rest of my life conducting that type of research; it just wasn't me. It became clear to me that I have an interest in the 'how', (in that it is not enough to just say we should do something, but that we need to explore how we do whatever is being suggested). If we cannot figure that out, then 'what' becomes moot. This, naturally, is the strategic aspect of business. However, my husband was already a strategic management professor and I did not want to be in a dual-career marriage, where we were looking for jobs in the same field in the same location. This led me to look closely at marketing, which allowed me to pursue the same strategic perspective, just from a functional area.

### Your writing focuses on a variety of marketing topics. Why did you decide to take this broad approach?

I have always been an eclectic scholar. One of my former mentors, Tom Bonoma, would probably say that I have fallen into the trap of global mediocrity – I work on a lot of different topics without ever going in depth. I don't think this was a conscious choice, but I do know that I've done it with my eyes wide open. In my initial research, springing from my doctoral programme, I did study cross-functional integration and decision making in depth, and it opened the door to pursuing a wide variety of topics. It might be because I met so many people from different areas when focusing on this, or maybe cross-functionality is just in my DNA.

### Could you briefly outline your current research and what motivated this line of enquiry?

My latest work has largely evolved from relationships with various scholars. For example, the Women in Emerging Markets project came from meeting my co-authors at a conference and talking about our shared interest in women, emerging markets, digital marketing and entrepreneurship. The family business research was the same. That said, some marketing topics are just close to my heart. In particular, my work in the educational scholarship realm is truly me. For example, the Sexism and Gendered Marketing project and the ultimate paper are a result of my strong feelings. The educational stakeholder paper is both person-driven (writing with that particular co-author) and topical-interest-driven (some of my work talks about stakeholders). The direct selling research is probably another function of my DNA, as my parents were direct sellers.

The threads that run through my papers do run for many years, however. For example, a 2015 procurement paper might appear to be a new interest, but actually I wrote about purchasing back in 1986. The cross-functional research that evolved in my doctoral programme at Harvard Business School permeates everything that I have done and still do – whether it is traditional academic research or educational pedagogy. I suspect the only 'new' topical area for me was digital marketing, and that was due to the newness of the field.

### What challenges have you encountered during the course of your career?

Probably only time. As one matures in the educational world, there are more demands on time. I cannot focus on teaching, or college administration, or service to the academy, and I cannot focus on my research. Instead, I am juggling all these things. Add in three children and a husband, and even 24 hours a day, seven days a week is not enough to do everything.



## Turning marketing on its head

Work in the Department of Marketing at **Babson College**, USA, is helping to make marketing better informed and more reflective

*Business and marketing can be less 'top down' and more 'side by side', with collaboration between companies and their customers creating mutually beneficial outcomes*

MARKETING HAS PROBABLY never been as important as it is now. Its influence on and relationship with the digital economy is both profound and obvious. In parallel, globalization and the integration of the world economy are expanding at an unprecedented pace, prompting new and recurring questions for marketers. For example, how should existing principles be applied in new contexts? What new methods are required? How can emerging markets be catered for?

These questions are being explored in their wider business context by Professor Victoria L Crittenden, Chair of the Marketing Division at Babson College in Massachusetts. Crittenden brings an unusually broad perspective and range of skills and knowledge to her work, which is frequently pursued in collaboration with colleagues from other disciplines. She is a prolific and award-winning author, publishing numerous journal articles and book chapters; an active editor, working on both books and article collections; and has held a variety of editorial positions and directorships. She is also a regular speaker. Constituting an impressive record in itself, this background gives her the means to approach some difficult and multi-dimensional subjects.

### REVOLUTIONIZING THE FIELD

As Crittenden has observed in her research, marketing relies upon and utilizes various social constructs, one example being gender. Previously, these constructs were almost exclusively interpreted in a way that was both rigid and limited, with people divided into a few stereotyped categories. While this approach has by no means disappeared, companies' appreciation of their markets has broadened to encompass more groups and greater differentiation within those groups. Advertisements are no longer aimed exclusively at those in heterosexual relationships, for instance. This increased nuance and diversity requires adaptation, which is a challenge in itself, but nor does Crittenden see it as an area where neutrality is

the only position to adopt; in her teaching, she encourages students to become more aware of pervasive stereotypes and to consider how they, as marketers, conduct their business.

Awareness of the home market has expanded and it now contains new, or newly recognized elements as a result of the developments mentioned above, requiring some fresh thinking. In addition to this, emerging markets are an increasingly strong focus of current business activity, and of course they also require different ways of thinking. Clearly, effective communication (using new and traditional channels) is one of the key marketing challenges when interacting with customers and business partners from varying cultures, but the problems faced in this area go beyond marketing concerns. This is where academic research can help companies, with a variety of cross-cultural issues needing to be identified and addressed if business is to be conducted successfully. Furthermore, in combination with other developments, such as digital innovation, working in different markets is revolutionizing the field – it is one of the phenomena that Crittenden says “will continue to turn everything we know about marketing on its head”.

### UP CLOSE AND PERSONALIZED

Another area of radical change is 'co-creation', prompted and made possible by technological innovation. Business and marketing can be less 'top down' and more 'side by side', with collaboration between companies and their customers creating mutually beneficial outcomes. Customers gain a more personalized service that better matches their individual requirements, and companies benefit from increased knowledge of their customers, greater brand loyalty and, ultimately, increased and more sustainable profitability.

Crittenden sees the effects of the various developments affecting business and marketing as being complementary



### A cheater's world?

In addition to conventional marketing areas, Crittenden's work covers many aspects of business. Two areas of particular interest and concern are ethics and cross-cultural studies, and these were united in a 2009 paper on global attitudes to cheating that she co-authored. This focused on student attitudes and how these would express themselves later as students became business practitioners and leaders. The phenomenon of cheating was considered in the context of socio-economic system (e.g. capitalist or socialist), country corruption (classified according to international data), gender and – perhaps most intriguingly – 'moral philosophy'. This last quality referred to the code seen as most dominant in a subject's geographical area and was divided into Egoism, Formalism, Relativism, Virtue Ethics and Utilitarianism categories. The findings are interesting, perplexing and concerning by turns, with the authors concluding that tomorrow's business leaders are developing their professional practices in an environment where cheating is the norm, with everyone doing it simply because everyone else is doing it.

and pointing in the same direction. "They all make us strive to better understand our relationships with our customers – whether it be in the areas of co-creation or differing marketplaces," she explains. Nonetheless, she says that there is still room for traditional practices and values: "Direct sellers make up a large portion of our global marketplace and will continue to do so". Certainly, not everything changes, which means that work is still needed to help understand these conventional marketing approaches.

In fact, as Crittenden points out, "key methods haven't changed, just the engagement in the method". Indeed, her work uses anything from interview data to survey research to large data sets; she is happy to be flexible, using whatever method and information seems best, old or new.

### Governance and emerging markets

There is some disagreement about the terminology in this area, but, broadly speaking, emerging markets are undeveloped economies that are nonetheless active and somewhere on the road from 'developing' to 'developed'; they combine low income with rapid growth. (Countries can move in the opposite direction, but this is less common.) Corporate governance – the organization, decision-making processes, regulation, etc. of corporations – can be an uncertain factor and potentially a concern in emerging market environments. Crittenden says: "The governance issues surrounding emerging markets are timeless and critical to the long-term growth of markets". Cross-cultural research work, not least that involving ethics, can be a significant contributor to investigation and policy in this field.

### Women and emerging markets

One of Crittenden's research interests is the empowerment of female entrepreneurs in emerging market economies. She has identified information communication technologies as one of the means through which this is increasingly achieved and promoted, with social media in particular playing a useful and growing role.

Regarding her future research, then, it is no surprise that the well established will be mixed with 'hot topics'. "The greatest potential impact might come from the direct selling research and studies related to multi-cultural ethical concerns," she says. With this in mind, Crittenden is certainly keen to influence future policy in these areas for the better.

#### MARKETING AND BUSINESS

##### RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Exploring why marketers utilize certain tactics with particular relevance to gender, cross-functional decision-making, sustainability and ethics
- Addressing issues of concern to the direct selling marketplace
- Capturing the importance of educational scholarship as related to excellence in teaching

##### KEY COLLABORATORS

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VICTORIA CRITTENDEN is the Chair of the Marketing Division at Babson College. Previously a member of the marketing department faculty at Boston College, she served as department chair for nine years and chair of the MBA core faculty for three years. She holds a Doctor of Business Administration degree from Harvard Business School and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Arkansas. Crittenden is currently the Associate Editor of the *Journal of Marketing Education* and the Collections Editor of *Digital and Social Media Marketing and Advertising*. Her research in a wide range of marketing strategy topics (including sustainability, family business, ethics/corruption, emerging economies, cross-functional decision-making and direct selling) has been widely published.

