Call for papers: Markets and marketing at the bottom of the pyramid

Guest Editors: Katy Mason and Ronika Chakrabarti, University of Lancaster, UK Ramendra Singh, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, India

Special issue overview

In 2002, an article published in the Harvard Business Review (Prahalad and Hammond, 2002) brought to the forefront of business and academic attention a ‘missing market’ that was dormant, and ignored by multinational corporations. This missing market is argued to be worthy of our attention for its potential to contribute to both economic and social prosperity. The notion of markets at the bottom of the pyramid (BOP; defined to consist of consumers with spending power of $2 or less per day) is concerned with providing the ‘poor’ in developing and emergent economies with access to markets (also see, Brugmann and Prahalad, 2007). While Prahalad and Hammond (2002) champion the needs of the ‘invisible poor’ to the marketing efforts of multinational corporations, Karnani (2007) posits the need for base of the pyramid (BoP) producers to be at the forefront sustainable poverty alleviation.

In 2010, the Journal of Business Research (JBR) became the first management and general business journal to produce a Special Issue (SI) on subsistence markets. The JBR SI acted as an important showcase for revealing the complexities and diversities that occur within subsistence marketplaces. But these articles inevitably raised more questions than they answered. Despite such valuable contributions, little attempt has still been made to explore the role of theory to frame and further explore practices within these markets (Landrum, 2007). In a similar vein, explication of the differences or similarities between BOP markets and Subsistence markets has not been made.

The last decade has also seen a growing body of research into vulnerable consumer segments in developed countries (see Baker et al., 2005 for a review). Building on early work on consumer disadvantage in the marketplace (Andreasen, 1975; Caplovitz, 1963), Baker et al. (2005) proposed a model that emphasizes consumers’ experiences of vulnerability. They describe how consumers seem dependent on individual characteristics and states alongside particular external conditions (e.g. distribution of resources, logistical elements). Central to Baker et al.’s (2005) definition is the lack of control and power experienced by certain groups of consumers, and additionally that vulnerability is often heightened due to circumstances beyond the individual’s control. This has led to a stream of literature around the concept of ‘social marketing’. Here social marketing is understood as the need for developing good markets. Good markets work in ways that support the types of social world we want to live in. Thus, social marketing needs to build an understanding of what happens through the practices of everyday life. This suggests that there may well be more commonalities between markets for the ‘disenfranchised’ than initially the BOP literature suggests.
The purpose of this SI is to provide a forum from where different theoretical approaches to researching BOP markets can be explored and contrasted. Such approaches may seek to build on the market studies or practice-based approach to markets (Araujo, 2007; Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2007) featured in Marketing Theory (Araujo et al., 2008) as well as relating strongly to the notion of market creation. If BOP markets are to succeed, ‘bottom up’ as Viswanathan and Rosa (2010) suggest, then recognizing that markets can be made, and shaped (rather than just ‘discovered’ as typically presented in the extant marketing literature) is central here. Furthermore, how this is done within or even across different subsistence and BoP markets might be very revealing in generating insights into how markets can genuinely be good for the poor. This SI also speaks to the notion of vulnerable consumers and subsistence markets (Hill, 2002; Peñaloza and Venkatesh, 2006; Varman and Belk, 2008). By drawing on these theoretical approaches, we set out to bring together a wider conversation within the context of BoP.

**Purpose of the special issue**

In April 2011, the Marketing Department at Lancaster University hosted an interdisciplinary workshop that bought together sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, social practitioners, market practice scholars and social marketers to discuss and explore the nature of markets at the BoP. These international and interdisciplinary perspectives were captured in a collection of essays, soon to be published in *Marketing Theory*. The workshop and the essays raised many questions about our conceptualization of BoP markets and the theoretical contributions that marketing scholars might make to this field. This SI, seeks to generate insights into BoP markets by bringing together the work of scholars who are engaged with and care about making good markets at the BoP by exploring such questions as:

- What does social marketing look like at the BOP (developed vs. developing worlds)?
- What are policy makers doing to make and shape markets at the BOP?
- How can people organize for markets at BOP?
- Where and how are BOP initiatives emerging?
- How do managers and entrepreneurs focus R&D investment-intensive innovations on frugal innovations (*Jugaad*) to serve the BOP markets?
- How can we better explore or think about BOP markets as a non-homogenous group but with possible shared similarities and differences?
- What alternative theoretical lenses might help us conceptualize, understand, or explore BOP markets?
- What are the methodological challenges associated with studying markets at the BOP?

These are intended as indicative questions but we welcome research that speaks to the broader theme discussed here, or that challenges conceptualizations of BoP markets in some way.

Katy Mason  
Reader in Marketing and Management,  
Lancaster University, UK  
Email: k.j.mason@lancs.ac.uk
Ronika Chakrabarti  
Lecturer in Marketing,  
Lancaster University, UK  
Email: r.chakrabarti@lancs.ac.uk

Ramendra Singh  
Assistant Professor Marketing,  
Indian Institute of Management, India  
Email: ramendra@iimeal.ac.in

Submission criteria

Papers not exceeding 7,000 words should be submitted electronically via e-mail to Katy Mason at k.j.mason@lancs.ac.uk and should comply with the *Marketing Theory* guidelines for submission.

The review and selection of papers will follow the journal’s normal procedures (double-blind review). Submitted papers should not have been previously published nor be currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. High-quality submissions that are not selected for publication in the SI will be given full consideration for publication in a regular issue of the journal. The deadline for submission of paper is 1st December 2013.

References


