An Inaugural Commentary for the Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship

David Carson
University of Ulster at Jordanstown, Northern Ireland

Abstract: The Author considers the nature of the Interface and argues that it can be seen as a new paradigm, and, looks forward to colleagues and researchers using the medium of this Journal to further work and development at the Interface. David Carson on behalf of all us at the Interface thanks Professor Gerry Hills without whom none of this would have happened.

“At first glance the marketing and entrepreneurship interface appears to be based on the two main constituent disciplines of marketing and entrepreneurship. It might be argued that this reflects the inherent commonalities between the two disciplines and hence the acknowledgement of the interface. The obvious commonalities are well documented as incorporating aspects such as innovation and creativity; opportunistic; flexible; change orientation; and so on. Similarly both are essentially process based and market driven. Both disciplines also have a common managerial foundation in that they are heavily influenced by management disciplines such as finance and accounting, human resource management and operations management and, of course, these in turn are drawn from base theories and research in economics; organisational behaviour and development; psychology; sociology and anthropology.

Clearly this diversity of foundation carries a multiplicity of theories and paradigms which are reflected in the research at the interface. There are those in both marketing and entrepreneurship research who seek the notion of "One general theory" for marketing and for entrepreneurship, particularly those who are positivist and ontological in nature. However, in the absence of "one theory", researchers have instead been able to develop research around significant paradigms which serve to crystallise and reinforce scholarly thought in specific areas within each discipline. The marketing and entrepreneurship interface can be seen as a specific area, but as yet it has not developed the notion of a significant paradigm. Indeed, there are many who are asking the question, where is research at the interface going?
Muzyka and Hills[1] proposed three penetrative questions in seeking to understand the future direction of interface research. First, "What have we learned about the nature of entrepreneurial phenomena?" Second, we might reflect on the research process by asking, "What have we learned about how to research these phenomena, especially at the marketing entrepreneurship interface?" Finally, we might ask, "What future research opportunities and challenges exist?"

One of Muzyka and Hills' conclusions is that there is, ... a real lack of insight in our current theory..." They also question, "Just how well do existing marketing models and the traditional marketing paradigm fit the environment, behaviour and processes found in entrepreneurial organisations?" They reflect that research at the interface has moved on from the "exploratory" stage. But how far has research in this area moved beyond this exploratory or, as others have called it, the "discovery" stage of research?

There is much focus on definition considerations and in determining the parameters of the Interface. Similarly, as the Interface research evolves and develops, researchers are increasingly concerned with identifying the main themes of progression. Meaningful research progression has been suppressed, perhaps because of the lack of concrete principles and frameworks belonging to the Interface. In addition, the areas of commonality between marketing and entrepreneurship are largely centred around the people-related dimensions, therefore, there is much research concerned with behaviours, networks, and relationships, and the areas of commonality; similarity and difference that the Interface generates away from the base disciplines. In addressing the above question Carson and Coviello[2], in examining research literature from seven years of the AMA-UIC Marketing/Entrepreneurship Interface Symposium proceedings, determined that "discovery" research stems from the concerns with definition and scope and parameter. They also identified substantial research in either marketing or entrepreneurship which tended to belong to the school of "confirmation" (as opposed to research at the interface).

In a general sense it is suggested here that the interface may have a different positional perspective from research originating out of either marketing and entrepreneurship research disciplines. Generally, what is the research position of the Interface research? It can be said that it is not positivist and equally it is not post-modern. It is fair to say that many Interface researchers have been trained in the "modern positivist" mould and are therefore relatively conformist. If one was to try to position Interface research on a continuum between scientific positivism on one end, and postmodernism on the other, it clearly will lie somewhere between. Interface research can reflect modern positivist perspectives but equally can be radical and unconventional in its search for definition and parameters and understanding of the processes.
It is propositioned here that the marketing and entrepreneurship interface has reached a stage of development, which justifies a "new paradigm". The rationale for such a proposition is:

(1) Although research at the interface is perhaps in the "school of discovery", it has progressed sufficiently for it to be perceived as being uniquely different from either the marketing discipline or the entrepreneurship discipline.

(2) The acknowledged commonalities that the interface takes from marketing and entrepreneurship disciplines are extremely strong, not just in activity and decision making, but particularly in the research focus. For example, both are naturally and necessarily epistemological and have multiple realities and research, therefore, it tends to be naturalistic and constructivist in character and focus.

Is the strength of this focus justification itself for a new paradigm? The benefits of accepting such a notion are that it allows for a fresh perspective free from the shackles of conformity with mainstream and peripheral schools of thought from each of the host disciplines. Consider how research paradigms within each discipline can now stand alone as distinct areas of meaningful research, for example, in the context of marketing, paradigms are established for services marketing and relationship marketing, and similarly in entrepreneurial research we have growing paradigms for entrepreneurial enterprises and intrapreneurship, and so on. If the Interface is a distinct area of research then why not consider a single paradigm for it?"

My argument for a single paradigm is still pertinent today, although it would be easy to believe that not much has changed in the interim five years. In this time, Interface researchers have continued to research in the domain. They have disseminated their research through the same outlets as existed in 1995, primarily the UIC Symposia, annual conferences such as Babson and ICSB and some mainstream international marketing conferences, including of course the AMA-MEIG Interface ‘tracks’.

However, if there is to be movement towards a single paradigm, what, other than current conference dissemination might be expected? The emergence of a discipline (paradigm) can often be tracked in the textbook literature. As mentioned above, this can be seen in aspects of the marketing domain such as services and relationship marketing. Both these paradigms have evolved from being ‘additional’ chapters in marketing texts, through essential chapters in marketing texts, to marketing textbooks in their own field. Similar evolution can be plotted in small business and entrepreneurship textbook literature. In the past five years it is possible to discern the emergence of Interface chapters in marketing textbooks which are fast becoming ‘essential’ chapters in modern
marketing texts. It will not be long, I believe, before there will be regular publications of Interface textbooks in their own right.

Another manifestation of an emerging paradigm is the widening and deepening of academic research literature on the Interface. In the past five years the UK Academy of Marketing has established a ‘Special Interest Group’ (SIG) on the Interface, which now matches the work and profile of the UIC Symposia and the AMA-MEIG. Indeed, these international groups regularly co-sponsor conferences and events. The deepening of the research paradigm is observed in recent ‘special issues’ of renowned academic journals. The European Journal of Marketing being the first, followed by a recent issue of Marketing Education Review in conjunction with AMA-MEIG, and soon to be published, a special issue of the Journal of Marketing: Theory and Practice on the Interface. Further deepening can be observed in the emergence of specialist journals such as the New England Journal of Entrepreneurship and the alliance between AMA-MEIG and the Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship.

The latest and in my view, most significant manifestation of a specialist journal devoted to Interface research is this new journal. As someone who has worked with SMEs and their marketing practices and who has researched in the field for most of my academic life, this journal represents a huge watershed of significance. The success of the journal will signify the emergence of the Interface paradigm as a firmly established domain in its own right. The complete infrastructure is now in place; it is up to Interface researchers to exploit and develop this further. I personally look forward to being part of this ‘new world’ order.

David Carson, Professor of Marketing, School of Management, University of Ulster at Jordanstown, Northern Ireland.

This commentary expands upon views expressed in an editorial of a special issue of the European Journal of Marketing (Volume 29, Number 7, 1995).

REFERENCES
