






## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

## Guidelines for Theory Selection: The IMPACT Framework

Linda D. Hollebeek<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>  | V. Kumar<sup>6,7,8</sup>  | Rajendra K. Srivastava<sup>9</sup>  | Weng Marc Lim<sup>1,10,11,12</sup>  |  
Sigita Urbonavicius<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Sunway Business School, Sunway University, Sunway City, Selangor, Malaysia | <sup>2</sup>Vilnius University, Vilnius, Vilnius County, Lithuania | <sup>3</sup>Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn, Harju County, Estonia | <sup>4</sup>Umeå University, Umeå, Västerbotten County, Sweden | <sup>5</sup>University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa | <sup>6</sup>Goodman School of Business, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada | <sup>7</sup>HUST, Wuhan, Hubei Province, China | <sup>8</sup>WE School, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India | <sup>9</sup>Indian School of Business, Gachibowli, Hyderabad, Telangana, India | <sup>10</sup>ASU-Cintana Alliance Global Partner Affiliate Faculty, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA | <sup>11</sup>School of Business, Law and Entrepreneurship, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia | <sup>12</sup>Global Research Centre, Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon, Gyeonggi, Republic of Korea

**Correspondence:** Linda D. Hollebeek ([linda.hollebeek@umu.se](mailto:linda.hollebeek@umu.se); [lindah@sunway.edu.my](mailto:lindah@sunway.edu.my))

**Received:** 13 February 2025 | **Revised:** 29 June 2025 | **Accepted:** 30 June 2025

**Keywords:** macro-foundational theory | marketing | meso-foundational theory | micro-foundational theory | psychology | research impact | theory | theory selection

## ABSTRACT

Though the role of adopting an appropriate theory in shaping the publishability and impact of research has long been recognized, psychology and marketing researchers lack specific guidance on how to choose a theory to frame their work. Addressing this gap in the literature, this article proposes a set of guidelines for the selection of relevant macro-foundational theory to guide research projects addressing specific meso- or micro-foundational theoretical entities (e.g., constructs or individual decision-making) for research impact. Specifically, we develop a set of six guidelines to select an appropriate macro-foundational theory for research impact, including *Interestingness*, *Matching*, *Parsimony*, *Applicability*, *Conceptual rigor*, and *Testability* (collectively abbreviated as the “IMPACT” guidelines). We next depict the proposed guidelines in an organizing framework that specifies *Matching*, the theoretical co-infusion of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory, as the central action item for researchers to shape the impact of their work. Researchers are then advised to use the five remaining guidelines to assess the quality of their proposed *Matching* for research impact. We conclude by discussing pertinent implications that arise from our analyses (e.g., to ensure *Interestingness*, we recommend researchers to select a macro-foundational theory that refutes (vs. affirms) prior findings).

## 1 | Introduction

Over 80 years ago, Lewin (1943) recognized that “there is nothing so practical as a good theory” (cited in Madhavaram 2024, p. 6). Today, the importance of selecting an appropriate theory to frame research projects in psychology and marketing, whether empirical or purely conceptual, still cannot be overstated (Hollebeek et al. 2024). Specifically, the purpose of *theory*, a set of “systematically related sets of statements, including some law-like generalizations, that are empirically

testable” (Hunt 1983, p. 10), is to advance scientific understanding through a structure capable of explaining and/or predicting phenomena (Hanssens 2018; Cornelissen and Durand 2014). Theory therefore generalizes observed phenomena and guides the investigation of particular issues (e.g., by directing the development of a conceptual framework, hypotheses, or propositions; MacKenzie 2003; Yonkers 2020). For example, Bozkurt et al. (2021) draw on social identity theory to explore consumer perceptions to firms’ responsiveness to social media posts by individuals of different cultural profiles.

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2025 The Author(s). *Psychology & Marketing* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC.

The choice of theory is important, because while some theories are capable of illuminating specific concepts, issues, or research questions in novel ways, others may reveal little additional or thought-provoking insight (Davis 1971; Zeithaml et al. 2020). Mkhomazi and Iyamu (2013, p. 525) note: “*Selecting appropriate theory to underpin a study is... critical, ...because it shapes and defines the results.*” Therefore, the adoption of a relevant theory that is capable of yielding worthwhile new insight, when rigorously and thoughtfully argued and applied, allows scholarly works to make a substantial impact on their field (McKenna 2021; Sternberg and Gordeeva 1996). Though business practice may also guide the development of research projects (Kumar 2017a), the focus of this article is to uncover novel insight about how to choose a suitable theory to explain or predict specific phenomena.

*Research impact* refers to “a change that research outcomes produce upon academic activities, the economy, and society at large” (Reale et al. 2018, p. 298). Though research impact can be assessed in different ways (e.g., scientific, managerial, or societal impact; Palmatier et al. 2018; Ozanne et al. 2017), we focus on *scientific* impact, as measured by the influence a piece of research exerts on the field of psychology and marketing and on colleagues and their way of thinking, as typically measured by its accumulated (e.g., Scopus or Google Scholar) citations (Stremersch et al. 2007). While prior authors have pointed out key limitations of these scholarly metrics (e.g., by asserting that academia is becoming obsessed with measures like citation count or the h-index; Gruber 2014; Hughes et al. 2018), scholars across academic ranks (particularly those without or those seeking tenure) tend to be evaluated on these metrics to maintain or advance their position (Chan et al. 2012; Jaakkola and Vargo 2021), exposing their importance not only in terms of assessing the performance of individual research works but also of research careers (Lim 2025).

Though prior literature has highlighted the importance of choosing an appropriate theory to frame research projects (Reibstein et al. 2009; Yadav 2010), relatively few guidelines exist for researchers regarding how to choose a theory to date, exposing a pertinent gap in the psychology and marketing literature. In other words, despite the recognized importance of publishing theory-driven work (Van Hierden et al. 2022; Carnevale et al. 2017), and notwithstanding the widely acknowledged academic notion of *publish or perish* (Lim 2025; Homer and Lim 2024), psychology and marketing scholars currently lack a comprehensive set of guidelines to select a suitable theory to direct their work.

Moreover, while prior authors have addressed related issues (e.g., how to develop conceptual articles or sets of research propositions; Hulland 2020; Ulaga et al. 2021), they do not delve into the dynamics or issues characterizing the choice of theory in a research project, as illuminated in this article. For example, though Hollebeek et al. (2024) propose that key elements of the research topic (i.e., a specific micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity, such as a psychological construct) be *co-infused* with relevant hallmarks of the chosen macro-foundational theory, they do not offer specific guidance on how to choose a theory for research impact, as therefore addressed in this article. Furthermore, though prior authors offer suggestions for crafting

impactful research (e.g., Kumar et al. 2017; Madhavaram 2024; Tellis 2017; Varadarajan 2017), these typically do not focus on the role of the chosen theory in creating this impact, warranting further exploration.

This article makes two main contributions to the psychology and marketing literature. First, addressing the identified gap, we offer a set of six guidelines to select an appropriate macro-foundational theory to guide the investigation of specific meso- or micro-foundational theoretical entities (e.g., constructs or individual behaviors/decision-making; Vargo and Lusch 2017). Given the lack of such guidelines to date, (early career) scholars commonly face challenges regarding how to choose an appropriate theory to inform their work, as elucidated in this article. The guidelines primarily apply at the initial stages of the research process (i.e., *identification of the research problem* and *review of the literature*), which focus on choosing a topic of interest, summarizing extant findings, and identifying a novel perspective on the topic (Malhotra et al. 2020). Importantly, we predict the implementation of the guidelines, which can be used either in purely conceptual or empirical psychology and marketing research that deploys a prespecified macro- or meso-foundational theory, to help create impactful research.

The guidelines are summarized by the acronym of IMPACT (i.e., *Interestingness, Matching, Parsimony, Applicability, Conceptual rigor, and Testability* of the chosen theory), as shown in Figure 1. While *Interestingness* refers to the degree to which a theory and its integration in a research project generate novel understanding and/or ideas or extend or challenge existing beliefs (e.g., Schauerte et al. 2023), *Matching* denotes the theoretical integration or *co-infusion* of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity (e.g., a psychological concept) and the chosen macro-foundational theory (Yonkers 2020; Hollebeek et al. 2024). *Parsimony* reflects the extent to which the fewest possible assumptions or variables are used to explain an outcome (Gunitsky 2019; Tellis 2017), while *Applicability* denotes the extent to which the research generates managerially relevant findings (Schauerte et al. 2023). Moreover, though *Conceptual rigor* refers to the quality of conceptual development (Varadarajan 2003), *Testability* reflects the extent to which the integration of a macro-foundational theory in a research project yields findings that can be empirically tested or verified (Popper 1934; Vergne and Durand 2010).

Second, we propose an organizing framework of the six guidelines, which first suggests *Matching* as a core action for researchers to craft the impact of their work (i.e., by theoretically integrating or *co-infusing* the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory; Hollebeek et al. 2024). Researchers are then advised to use the five remaining guidelines (i.e., *Interestingness, Parsimony, Applicability, Conceptual rigor, and Testability*) to assess the quality of their proposed theoretical *Matching*. When *Matching* transpires at elevated levels of each of the five remaining criteria, the research is expected to make a contribution to the literature and exert a level of impact (Hanssens 2018; Tellis 2017).

We next review key literature on the application of macro-foundational theory in Section 2, followed by the

development of the proposed IMPACT framework in Section 3. The article concludes with a discussion of the framework and its key implications, and an agenda for further research, in Section 4.

## 2 | Literature Review

We present an integrative literature review (Snyder 2019) addressing the adoption of theory (Section 2.1), research problematization, motivation, and theorization (Section 2.2), and research impact (Section 2.3). Given theory's broad aim of *generalizing* specific phenomena of interest (Moorthy 1993; Hunt 1983), we draw on the psychology and marketing literature and beyond, as theoretical principles that apply in this topic area will also be applicable outside it, and vice versa (Bass 1995).

### 2.1 | Theoretical Micro-, Meso-, and Macro-Foundations

The importance of theory-driven research has been widely acknowledged in the literature, both in (psychology and) marketing (e.g., Carnevale et al. 2017) and in related (business) disciplines (Bagozzi 1984; Maass et al. 2018). Birken et al. (2017) identify multiple purposes of theory, including to specify construct relationships, enhance conceptual clarity, frame analyses, or inform data analysis, among others (Lewin 1945; Van De Ven 1989), yielding *theory-driven research* (Van Hierden et al. 2022). Theory not only structures research topics and projects, but also facilitates the development of (more) gener-

alizable insight, advancing scientific knowledge (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007).

However, despite the importance of theory-driven research, comparatively few guidelines exist for selecting macro-foundational theory to guide the investigation of specific meso- or micro-foundational theoretical entities (Villeneuve 2024), both in- and outside of psychology and marketing (Yonkers 2020), as discussed further below.

First, in line with Hunt (1983) aforementioned definition of theory, Mkhomazi and Iyamu (2013, p. 525) refer to (macro-foundational) theory as the *analytical lens* adopted in a research project, while Bacharach (1989, p. 498) defines theory as “a statement of relationships between units observed or approximated in the empirical world.” The deployed theory thus determines the focus and shapes the direction and findings of research projects. Gouldner (1957) recommends applying the theory to current issues in the discipline. For example, contemporary psychology and marketing researchers may adopt equity theory to explore the effects of responsible AI on consumer behavior (Ferrell and Ferrell 2024).

Second, theory exists at different levels of conceptual abstraction and aggregation, including macro- (or meta-), meso- (or mid-range), and micro-foundational (or micro-) theory (Coleman 1994; Vargo and Lusch 2017), as summarized in Table 1. Scrutiny of Table 1 yields the following observations. One, theoretical micro-foundations provide detailed explanation of phenomena, including individual dynamics or decision-making. Given their limited scope, theoretical

**TABLE 1** | Theoretical Micro-, Meso-, and Macro-Foundations.

| Theory designation            | Explanation  | Example(s)  |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Theoretical micro-foundations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The theoretical building blocks of macro-foundational theory, which have narrower or more applied conceptual applicability, rendering them closer to marketing practice (Brodie and Peters 2020; Hollebeek et al. 2021).</li> <li>Also known as the <i>micro-theoretical level</i> (Vargo and Lusch 2017).</li> </ul>                                       | Individual actions or behaviors.  |
| Theoretical meso-foundations  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect micro-level processes and relevant macro-level theoretical entities (Homer and Lim 2024; Storbacka et al. 2016).</li> <li>Their level of theoretical aggregation and abstraction lies in between that of theoretical micro- and macro-foundations.</li> <li>Also known as the <i>mid-range theoretical level</i> (Vargo and Lusch 2017).</li> </ul> | Concepts or constructs (e.g., customer engagement; the stakeholder journey; Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek, Kumar, et al. 2023). |
| Theoretical macro-foundations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive, all-encompassing theoretical entities characterized by high levels of theoretical aggregation and abstraction.</li> <li>Also known as the <i>meta-theoretical level</i> (Vargo and Lusch 2017).</li> </ul>   | Hunt's (1971) morphology of theory and general theory of marketing; Bartels' (1968) general theory of marketing.                |

Note: Adapted from and extending Hollebeek et al. (2024).

micro-foundations are closer to the realm of business practice and empirical investigation (Felin et al. 2015; Brodie and Peters 2020). Two, meso-foundational theory typically exists at the *concept* or *construct* level (e.g., customer engagement; Hollebeek et al. 2021; Storbacka et al. 2016), permitting broader, more generalizable assertions (vs. micro-foundational theory). Three, theoretical macro-foundations cover broad, far-reaching theoretical ground (Zaltman et al. 1985). For example, Bartels' (1968) general theory of marketing, Vargo and Lusch's (2017) S-D logic, or Mahajan et al.'s (2023) Value-Dominant logic aim to comprehensively cover the scope of the marketing discipline, reflecting yet further elevated levels of theoretical abstraction and aggregation (vs. theoretical micro- or meso-foundations).

We focus on the selection of macro-foundational theory to guide the investigation of specific micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entities (e.g., concepts). In some cases, researchers may choose more than one macro-foundational theory (e.g., two theories) to frame their work (e.g., if they require relevant aspects of both theories; Yonkers 2020). For example, Ferdous et al. (2024) draw on stimulus-organism-response theory and S-D logic to investigate consumers' mobile app-related behaviors.

Third, marketing researchers often borrow relevant macro-foundational theory from other or related disciplines, including psychology (e.g., the dark triad), sociology (e.g., conflict theory), economics (e.g., transaction cost economics), or information systems (e.g., the technology acceptance model), among others (Murray et al. 1995; Nelson et al. 2017; Yonkers 2020). Given the nature of (psychology and) marketing as an applied social science (Hughes et al. 2012), coupled with its relative infancy as a discipline (Sheth 2017), the application of theory from other disciplines, if thoroughly, thoughtfully, and rigorously implemented, tends to be well received in this cross-disciplinary field (Mariani et al. 2022; Pedersen 2021).

## 2.2 | Research Problematization, Motivation, and Theorization

After selecting the micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity to be studied (e.g., consumers' attachment to AI), it is important to problematize and motivate the research, irrespective of whether it is empirical or purely conceptual in nature (Hulland 2019, 2020). To this end, authors will first synthesize extant knowledge in the topic area (i.e., what is known), followed by the identification of key issues warranting further investigation (i.e., the gap(s) in the literature). To craft (a) meaningful literature-based gap(s), *problematization*, the identification and challenging of underlying theoretical assumptions to generate new insight (Sandberg and Alvesson 2011, p. 247), is pertinent. To provide answers to the outlined problematization, the chosen micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity is explained, motivated, and justified through the lens of the chosen macro-foundational theory (MacInnis 2011; Storbacka et al. 2016), as outlined further in Section 3.

To problematize and motivate the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity, Hollebeek et al. (2024) suggest (i) unpacking *what* the research does to augment extant insight in psychology and marketing (i.e., synthesizing its core contribution), (ii) *how* it proposes to advance the literature (i.e., through the

adopted research approach), and (iii) *why* these analyses add value to psychology and marketing scholars and practitioners (e.g., by outlining the theoretical and managerial value of the proposed analyses; Whetten 1989). Therefore, while problematization entails gap-spotting (Sandberg and Alvesson 2011), *theorization* (or *theorizing*) about the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity vis-à-vis the chosen macro-foundational theory serves as a theoretical bridging process to resolve the problematized literature-based gap(s) (Weick 1995).

## 2.3 | Research Impact

Though impact represents a widely applied research metric (Hulland 2019), including in (psychology and) marketing (Kumar 2015; Donthu et al. 2021), debate surrounds its conceptualization and scope (Ozanne et al. 2017; Madhavaram 2024). For example, while Reale et al. (2018, p. 298) define *research impact* as a "change that research outcomes produce upon academic activities, the economy, and society at large," reflecting a three-dimensional view, Moed and Halevi (2015, p. 1990) view the concept to comprise four dimensions (i.e., scientific, educational, economic, and social impact).

Moreover, Jaakkola and Vargo (2021) identify three types of research impact, including (i) *scientific impact*, the influence of a research work on scholars in the field or across fields and/or its ability to shape the progression or direction of the field (Chan et al. 2012), (ii) *business impact*, the ability of a research work to inform a firm's marketing strategy or boost its performance (Hanssens 2018; Kumar et al. 2017; Roberts et al. 2014), and (iii) *societal impact*, the extent to which a research work ameliorates stakeholders' or societal wellbeing or its influence on public or collective decision-making (Ozanne et al. 2017; Lindgreen et al. 2021). We focus on *scientific impact*, as gauged primarily through citations per article or per scholar (Lim 2025; Glick et al. 2007). We next introduce the proposed IMPACT guidelines and organizing framework for theory selection to achieve scientific research impact.

## 3 | IMPACT Guidelines and Framework for Theory Selection for Research Impact

Extending prior authors (e.g., Coleman 1994; Hollebeek et al. 2024; Vargo and Lusch 2017), we propose the six "IMPACT" guidelines of *Interestingness*, *Matching*, *Parsimony*, *Applicability*, *Conceptual rigor*, and *Testability*, which collectively guide the selection of a suitable macro-foundational theory to explore (a) specific micro- or meso-theoretical entity or entities (see Table 2; Figure 1).

We identify *Matching* as the core action item for researchers to create impactful work, as discussed further in Section 3.1. Researchers are then advised to use the five remaining guidelines to assess the quality of their proposed *Matching* for research impact, as discussed further in Sections 3.2 through to 3.6, respectively. Of these, *Interestingness*, *Applicability*, and *Conceptual rigor* form the substantive contribution (the "What" and the "So what") of the research, as shown in a green font in Figure 1. Moreover, *Parsimony* and *Testability* describe the



**TABLE 2** | IMPACT Guidelines for Theory Selection.

| Guideline              | Definition  | Elaboration  | Potential strategies and examples   |
|------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>Interestingness</i> | The degree to which <i>Matching</i> generates novel understanding and/or ideas or extends or challenges existing beliefs (e.g., Schauerte et al. 2023; MacInnis 2011; Shugan 2003; Tsang 2022).   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Challenging readers' assumptions or worldviews, thus adding important novel insight that changes their thinking (Tellis 2017; MacInnis 2011).</li> <li>o Viewing a construct's nomological network (i.e., antecedents and consequences) in a new light (Davis 1971).</li> <li>o Identifying links between previously unrelated phenomena (Davis 1971).</li> <li>o Identifying similarities between previously opposing phenomena (Davis 1971).</li> </ul>   | <p>Ways to ensure or raise <i>Interestingness</i> include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Being (among the) first to link a relevant macro-foundational theory to a particular micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity. For example, drawing on the theory of planned behavior, Tikir and Lehmann (2011) link consumer behavior to climate change.</li> <li>o Raising surprising or counter-intuitive findings. For example, by addressing the <i>dark side</i> of a phenomenon that is generally viewed as positive (e.g., the dark side of customer satisfaction or of consumer emotions when using AI; Hollebeek et al. 2024).</li> </ul> |
| <i>Matching</i>        | The theoretical integration or co-infusion of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity (e.g., a psychological concept) and the chosen macro-foundational theory (e.g. Yonkers 2020; Hollebeek et al. 2024).             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o A <i>Matching</i> or fitting theory allows researchers to co-infuse key characteristics of the macro-foundational theory with those of the micro- or meso-theoretical entity (Hollebeek et al. 2024).</li> <li>o <i>Matching</i> ensures an adequate fit between the studied micro/ meso- theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory from a conceptually grounded perspective (e.g., Stremersch 2021).</li> <li>o To facilitate <i>Matching</i>, the chosen macro-foundational theory must overlap, coincide, relate, or be able to be linked to the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity in new, important, and meaningful ways.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Fournier (1998) links relationship theory to consumer/brand relationships, offering an intuitive match.</li> <li>o Wolf et al. (2021) adopt interdependence theory to explore fitness app users' interdependence (i.e., cooperation vs. competition) with one another.</li> </ul>  |
| <i>Parsimony</i>       | The extent to which <i>Matching</i> uses the fewest possible assumptions or variables to adequately explain an outcome. Parsimony thus focuses on theoretical conciseness and simplification (Gunitsky 2019; Shugan 2003), as achieved by | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Parsimony</i> eliminates theoretical elements, discussion, or analysis that are not strictly needed to explain or predict a phenomenon of interest.</li> <li>o The pursuit of parsimony is a trade-off. On the one hand,</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o In scale development research, superfluous construct dimensions or items that do not characterize the focal construct are routinely eliminated. (e.g., using confirmatory factor analysis,</li> </ul>  |

(Continues)

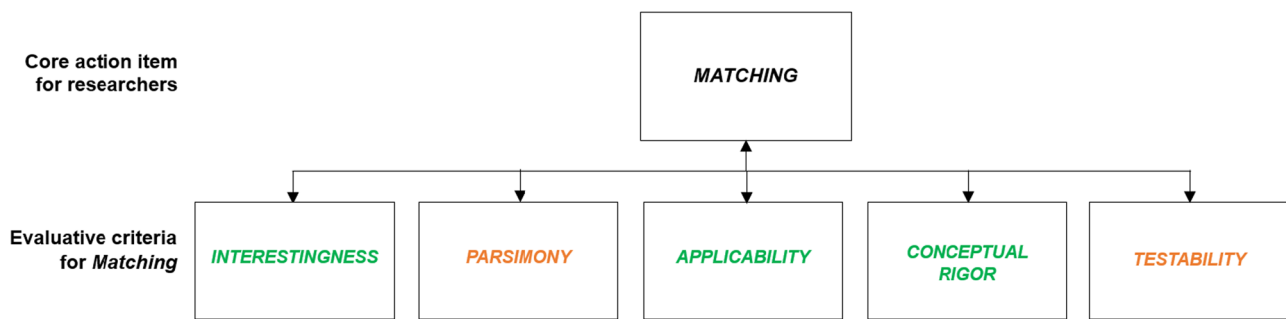
TABLE 2 | (Continued)

| Guideline        | Definition  | Elaboration   | Potential strategies and examples  |
|------------------|---|---|--|
|                  | excluding or removing what is unnecessary (Sober 1982).   | <p>“less is more” (see Occam’s razor; Ball 2016; Tellis 2017). On the other hand, parsimonious models may compromise theory-driven explanation or overlook key aspects of a theory or construct (Chaiken et al. 1999; Midgley 1984).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Overall, academics are advised to pursue <i>balanced Parsimony</i> by aiming for parsimonious analysis but not at the expense of theoretical groundedness, explanation, and depth (Midgley 1984).</li> </ul>                      | Malär and Giuffredi-Kähr (2024, p. 7) removed three items from their proposed scale measuring the <i>dark triad of brand personality</i> due to squared multiple correlations). Likewise, Tian et al. (2001, p. 53) removed 12 items from their <i>need for uniqueness</i> scale.  |
| Applicability    | The “extent to which [ <i>Matching</i> and the] research implications [it generates] ...can be directly or indirectly implemented in [marketing] practice” (Schauerte et al. 2023, p. 804). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Researchers are advised to work on projects that address managerially relevant issues. To identify such issues, they may consult documents like the MSI’s biennial Research Priorities, which are developed in conjunction with MSI member companies.</li> <li>o They may also combine key (emerging) themes for enhanced specificity of their research (e.g., by combining AI and ethics in relevant ways to help managers navigate this complex environment).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o In the mid to late 2000s, managerial interest in the <i>customer engagement</i> concept was rapidly growing (Sawhney et al. 2005). However, scholarly understanding of the concept lagged behind at the time (Brodie et al. 2011), offering an opportunity to conceptualize the concept (Hollebeek et al. 2021) and to operationalize it (e.g., see Vivek et al.’s (2014) or Hollebeek et al.’s (2014) <i>customer engagement</i> scales), which allow managers to gauge their customers’ engagement and develop strategic customer engagement programs.</li> </ul> |
| Conceptual rigor | The “quality of conceptual development” in the <i>Matching</i> process (Varadarajan 2003, p. 369).  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o To ensure conceptual rigor, the adoption of a relevant, fitting macro-foundational theory is typically required (Gnyawali and Song 2016).</li> <li>o Prior authors offer different sets of conditions for conceptual rigor (see Table 3).</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o In line with Varadarajan (2003) and Suddaby (2010), Fu et al. (2024) draw on relevant literature to synthesize the state of the field, define the studied constructs, and explicate the nature of the proposed conceptual relationships, among others.</li> <li>o Varadarajan’s (2003) <i>complementary</i> (vs. <i>competing</i>) <i>perspectives</i> are observed to differing degrees across research works. For example, Harrison (2009) addresses and balances</li> </ul>  |

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

| Guideline          | Definition   | Elaboration  | Potential strategies and examples  |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| <i>Testability</i> | The extent to which <i>Matching</i> can be empirically tested or verified (Popper 1934). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Macro-foundational theoretical entities (theories) typically feature high levels of abstraction (Vargo and Lusch 2017), seeing their relative removal from testable, practical issues (Storbacka et al. 2016).</li> <li>To address this issue, researchers can (a) adopt more easily operationalizable constructs derived from a macro-foundational theory (if available), or (b) develop such more easily operationalizable constructs to facilitate empirical testability.</li> </ul> | <p>competing perspectives on consumers' evaluation of artistic work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As S-D logic exists at a relatively high level of theoretical abstraction (Vargo and Lusch 2017), Yi and Gong (2013) operationalized <i>customer value co-creation behavior</i>, rendering S-D logic's co-creation concept less abstract by making it measurable and thus testable.</li> </ul> |



**FIGURE 1** | Organizing framework - IMPACT guidelines for theory selection. *Notes* - Guidelines stated in green (*Interestingness*, *Applicability*, and *Conceptual rigor*) form the substantive contribution (the “What” and the “So what”) of *Matching*; Guidelines stated in orange (*Parsimony* and *Testability*) describe the execution (the “How”) of *Matching*.

execution (the “How”) of the *Matching* process, as depicted in an orange font in Figure 1.

As theory aims to generalize specific phenomena of interest (Weick 1995; Woodside and Baxter 2013), we were able to not only draw on the psychology and marketing literature, but also on relevant publications in related areas of inquiry to inform our analyses. Overall, we suggest that high-impact research typically features elevated, or at least adequate, levels of *each* of the proposed guidelines, as illustrated further in the Appendix that features the application of the proposed guidelines to two recently published articles.

### 3.1 | Matching

*Matching*, the theoretical integration of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-

foundational theory, represents a key criterion for impactful research (Roberts and Pashler 2000; Dorobantu et al. 2024; see Table 2). Specifically, *Matching* sees the theoretical *co-infusion* of the chosen macro-foundational theory's characteristics or attributes with the studied micro- or meso-theoretical entity's tenets (Hollebeek et al. 2024), imbuing the research with theoretical structure (Yonkers 2020). In other words, this *co-infusion* process links the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity's hallmarks to the macro-foundational theory's constituents that are typically modeled as antecedents or consequences of the former (e.g., in a conceptual model; MacInnis 2011), allowing researchers to propose specific theoretical associations between these. For example, using interdependence theory, Hollebeek, Kumar, et al. (2023) *co-infuse* stakeholders' structural interdependence tenets (e.g., covariation of interest) with their role-related engagement and experience through their respective journey with the firm.

To ensure adequate *Matching* of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory, their respective content must (to an extent) overlap, coincide, or be able to be linked to one another in salient ways. For example, research investigating service quality (SERVQUAL) from a Value-Dominant (V-D) logic perspective should link SERVQUAL's tenets (i.e., Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, and Responsiveness; Parasuraman et al. 1988; Lee and Yi 2022) to V-D logic's eight principles (see Mahajan et al. 2023, p. 1255) to ensure their *comprehensive* theoretical co-infusion. Theoretical co-infusion thus requires authors to link *each* of the chosen macro-foundational theory's principles or attributes to *each* of the micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity's tenets (Hollebeek et al. 2024). After *Matching* the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity with the chosen macro-foundational theory, researchers are encouraged to utilize the remaining IMPACT criteria (i.e., *Interestingness*, *Parsimony*, *Applicability*, *Conceptual rigor*, and *Testability*) to assess the quality and expected impact of their theoretical *Matching*, as shown in Figure 1 and as also discussed further in the following sub-sections.

### 3.2 | Interestingness

*Interestingness*, the degree to which *Matching* generates novel understanding and/or ideas or extends or challenges existing beliefs (e.g., Schauerte et al. 2023; see Table 2), represents a key tenet of impactful research. Though the literature has traditionally addressed the overall *Interestingness* of research projects or ideas (MacInnis 2011), in line with our objectives we focus on the particular *Interestingness* sub-set of the theoretical co-infusion of studied micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory (Tsang 2022). Specifically, psychology and marketing researchers who select a theory that is seen as *interesting* are well set-up to publish impactful research (Kumar 2015; Moorman et al. 2019; Varadarajan 2017).

So, what makes the *Matching* of a micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory, *interesting*? Prior research proposes that interesting *Matching* unveils novel, insightful understanding, provides a punchline or an *aha* moment in readers, and/or proposes surprising ideas (Davis 1971; Nunamaker et al. 2017; Smith 2003). In other words, *Matching* that is viewed as *interesting* may tend to challenge or refute (vs. affirm) readers' assumptions, worldviews, or beliefs (e.g., by providing a fresh perspective or by offering unexpected, counter-intuitive, or to date overlooked findings; Davis 1971; MacInnis 2011; Tellis 2017; Zaltman et al. 1985).

To repudiate existing or prevailing perspectives, authors may (for instance) illuminate the potential *dark side* or unintended (e.g., psychological) consequences of phenomena that are generally viewed as positive, or vice versa (Mikalef et al. 2022). For example, they may identify consumers' reduced sense of psychological ownership in their AI-informed (vs. organic) purchase decision-making, or they may find that consumers become more loyal to the influencer (vs. to the firm) in influencer marketing (Giertz et al. 2022; Weiger et al. 2025), offering fresh insight. Moreover, interesting *Matching* may provide opposing or more

nuanced results (e.g., by showing that the mainstream perspective only holds under specific conditions, but not others) or explore specific micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entities from a novel macro-foundational perspective.

### 3.3 | Parsimony

*Parsimony*, refers to the extent to which *Matching* uses the fewest possible assumptions or variables to adequately explain an outcome (Gunitsky 2019; Shugan 2003), as achieved by excluding or removing what is unnecessary (Sober 1982; see Table 2). Overall, parsimonious (vs. non-parsimonious) research is, typically, more impactful. In this vein, Occam's (Occam's) razor recommends developing explanations for specific phenomena that contain the smallest possible set of elements (Ariew 1976). While several (psychology and) marketing authors support this plea for simplicity and brevity (Lehmann et al. 2011; Tellis 2017), others offer important caveats to the pursuit of theoretical parsimony (Midgley 1984).

Advocating for parsimony, Tellis (2017) posits that the best theory offers the simplest explanation for the studied phenomenon, while Shugan (2003) cautions that less parsimonious models tend to offer weaker answers. Likewise, Einstein suggested that "the grand aim of all science is to cover the greatest number of empirical facts by logical deduction from the smallest number of hypotheses or axioms" (cited in Barnett 2005). Moreover, though composing parsimonious models is a demanding task, failing to do so runs the risk of creating excessively broad models that lack meaning and limit the emergence of insightful results.

Conversely, others pose pertinent caveats to pursuing parsimonious conceptual models (Chaiken et al. 1999). For example, Midgley (1984) cautions that a focus on parsimony may come at the expense of theory-driven explanation, from which the author recommends placing a "relatively moderate weight" on parsimony in theory development and application, because "simplicity represents neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a theory's truth or veracity" (p. 447). Midgley (1984, p. 448) thus recommends emphasizing theoretical groundedness, explanation, and depth (vs. parsimony).

Moreover, when misinterpreted, parsimony is conducive to the acceptance of Type II errors (false negative conclusions) to keep Type I errors (false positive conclusions) in check (Deshpande 1983; Cronbach 1975). Relatedly, Ball (2016) argues that Occam's razor only applies if different theories predict identical findings but one is simpler than the other. However, these situations remain rare in the applied social sciences, as rival theories typically depart from one another in terms of the nature of their respective attributes (i.e., different theories comprise unique sets of theoretical constituents; Varadarajan 2017), yielding differing observations, predictions, or conclusions.

We thus argue for the importance of pursuing *Parsimony*, including by removing superfluous, duplicate, or unnecessary material (Sober 1982) when *Matching* the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory. However, the quest for *Parsimony* should



not be taken as far as to strip core theoretical elements that are required to rigorously, comprehensively, and meaningfully *Match* relevant theoretical entities (Tellis 2017). Therefore, *each* of the core elements of the adopted micro- or meso- (and macro)-foundational theoretical entities needs to be retained in the *Matching* process. Overall, we support the notion of *balanced Parsimony* (Steward et al. 2024) by including *core* theoretical attributes in theoretical *Matching*, while excluding those that can be done away with.

### 3.4 | Applicability

*Applicability*, the extent to which *Matching* and the research implications it generates can be directly or indirectly implemented in marketing practice (Schauerte et al. 2023; see Table 2), is likewise core to ensure high-quality *Matching* (Kumar 2018; Jaworski 2011).

Though academic research has faced long-standing critique for its limited managerial applicability (Jennings 1994; Kohli and Haenlein 2021), scholarly communities are acutely aware of the importance of their work in shaping, guiding, or informing managerial practice (Varadarajan 2017, 2003). Therefore, many business schools collaborate with industry partners (e.g., through research centers; Kumar 2017b; Palmatier 2017) to raise the managerial relevance of their work, including by facilitating academic/industry collaborations, assessing key decision-making factors, or by revolutionizing managerial knowledge, among others (Schauerte et al. 2023; Wierenga 2021).

We advise scholars to undertake theory-driven *Matching* that addresses managerially relevant issues, which Stremersch (2021) denotes as *thought leadership*, raising not only the scientific, but also the managerial, impact of their work (Palmatier et al. 2018; Ozanne et al. 2017). For example, Fournier (1998) *Matches* relationship theory with consumers' brand relationships, facilitating the development of a academic *and* managerial insight into how consumers bond with their brands.

### 3.5 | Conceptual Rigor

*Conceptual rigor*, the "quality of conceptual development" (Varadarajan 2003, p. 369), represents a core evaluative criterion for authors' proposed *Matching* (see Table 2). For example, the development of the research questions, hypotheses, or propositions is impacted by the level of conceptual rigor (Houston 2019; Roozeboom 1991; Van De Ven 1989), shaping the potential impact of the research (Shrivastava 1987). In other words, *Matching* is only as good as its level of *Conceptual rigor*.

Conceptually rigorous *Matching* is achieved by clearly explaining the application and fit of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory, permitting systematic assessments of their theoretical interplay (Sutton and Staw 1995; Whetten 1989). In other words, the selected macro-foundational theory directs the exploration of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity in new ways (Bacharach 1989), as also illustrated further in the Appendix.

So, how do researchers ensure the elevated *Conceptual rigor* of their *Matching* processes? Varadarajan (2003, p. 369) outlines four key considerations, including (i) drawing on relevant literature to sketch the current state of the field, to explain the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory, and to establish key theoretical linkages between them, (ii) paying attention to definitional issues (i.e., by unambiguously conceptualizing key constructs and/or by minimizing overlap between them; Hollebeek et al. 2024), (iii) using evidence to support one's position (e.g., by offering clear examples or (mini)cases), and (iv) objectively explaining and discussing complementary or alternate perspectives (e.g., by drawing on competing hypotheses).

Suddaby (2010) offers a related set of criteria to achieve *Conceptual rigor*, which center on clearly and unambiguously explaining the studied phenomena. These include: (a) clear micro- or meso-foundational construct identification and definition, similar to Varadarajan's (2003) second step, (b) clarification of the scope or boundary conditions of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity from the perspective of the chosen macro-foundational theory, (c) clear articulation of the examined micro- or meso-foundational construct relationships through the lens of the adopted macro-foundational theory, in line with Varadarajan's (2003) third step, and (d) ensuring internal coherence of the argumentation addressing the micro- or meso-, and the macro-, foundational theoretical entities. In Table 3, we synthesize and elaborate on Varadarajan's (2003) and Suddaby's (2010) conceptual rigor facets.

### 3.6 | Testability

High-quality *Matching* facilitates the development of *testable* predictions (Fried 2020), or those that can be empirically tested or verified (Hunt 1983; see Table 2). Therefore, a statement, proposition, or hypothesis is testable if it is possible to determine whether it is true or false by testing it (Popper 1934; Hunt 1993). However, while myriad issues might be *testable*, it is important to determine whether specific instances of *Matching* are *worth testing*. In this vein, Van Rooij and Baggio (2020) raise the importance of a *priori verisimilitude* (i.e., the upfront or intuitive plausibility or viability of *Matching*; Hand 2010).

While *Matching* a macro-foundational theory with a particular micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity is commonplace in the literature, macro-foundational theory inherently exists at higher levels of theoretical abstraction (Vargo and Lusch 2017), implying its coverage of more abstract, broader ideas or phenomena (vs. micro/meso-foundational theoretical entities; Brodie and Peters 2020). In other words, macro-foundational theory tends to be relatively far removed from the realm of practical or managerial issues, as covered more typically in micro-foundational theory, challenging the former's empirical testability (Lindgreen et al. 2020; Vergne and Durand 2010).

To bridge this gap, researchers are advised to adopt previously operationalized constructs that are *derived* from the adopted macro-foundational theory, if available. For example, Yi and Gong's (2013) *customer value co-creation behavior*, or Karpen et al.'s (2015) *S-D orientation*, scales are derived from (and thus

**TABLE 3** | Key Conceptual Rigor Facets.

| Conceptual rigor facet  | Guidelines   |
|---|--|
| 1. Sketching the current state of the field   | Researchers are advised to draw on relevant literature addressing the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory to sketch the current state of the field and its key gap(s) in the literature (Varadarajan 2003).  |
| 2. Micro- or meso-foundational construct identification and clear definition  | <p>A good definition should (Suddaby 2010, p. 350):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensively capture the essential properties and characteristics of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity or entities (also see Varadarajan 2003).</li> <li>Avoid tautology or circularity (e.g., by using the term being defined (e.g., customer engagement) in the proposed definition or by including its antecedents or consequences (e.g., customer experience) in its definition (MacKenzie 2003; Hollebeek et al. 2021).</li> <li>Be parsimonious.</li> </ol>   |
| 3. Clarification of the scope and conditions for the micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity (entities) and the chosen macro-foundational theory | <p>Researchers should specify the level of analysis of the studied micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity (entities) in terms of (Bacharach 1989):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Space, as constructs may apply differently across consumers, firms, cultures, or other (e.g., psychological) variables or circumstances.</li> <li>Time, as psychological constructs tend to be temporally bound. Thus, temporal changes may affect the construct's manifestation.</li> <li>Values, which (for instance) may arise from the researcher's assumptions or worldview (Suddaby 2010, p. 350). To address this issue, researchers are advised to clearly explain the assumptions and views they bring to the theorization of a micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity and offer relevant explanatory examples (Varadarajan 2003). Clearer, higher-quality explanation tends to raise <i>Conceptual rigor</i>.</li> </ol> |
| 4. Clear articulation of the micro- or meso-foundational theoretical relationships  | <p>To understand the studied micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity (entities) from the perspective of the chosen macro-foundational theory:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The characteristics of the studied micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity should be assessed vis-à-vis the key tenets of the chosen macro-foundational theory (i.e., through <i>Matching</i>);</li> <li>The linkages between the studied micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory (i.e., their <i>Matching</i>) should be clearly explained (Bacharach 1989). For example, authors may show the historic lineage of the studied micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity and position it vis-à-vis the chosen theory. Clear, unambiguous examples should be used to illustrate specific theoretical relationships (Varadarajan 2003).</li> </ol>  |
| 5. Internal coherence of the argumentation vis-à-vis the chosen macro-foundational theory   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Coherence</i> refers to the theorist's ability to use the studied micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory to create logically consistent and theoretically sound, integrative arguments (Suddaby 2010, p. 352).</li> <li>The studied micro/meso-foundational theoretical entity, its definition, its scope conditions, its lineage, and its</li> </ol>   |

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

| Conceptual rigor facet | Guidelines  |
|------------------------|---|
|                        | relationship to the key tenets of the chosen macro-foundational theory should make sense. That is, they must all cohere or fit together in a logically consistent manner (Hollebeek et al. 2024). |
|                        | c. Researchers are also invited to objectively discuss complementary or competing perspectives (e.g., by using competing propositions or hypotheses; Varadarajan 2003).                           |

Note: Adapted from and extending Varadarajan (2003) and Suddaby (2010).

reflect) S-D logic. If such instruments are unavailable, researchers are encouraged to conceptualize and operationalize worthwhile new constructs from their chosen macro-foundational theory (e.g., Roy et al. 2024), boosting the *Testability* of their *Matching*.

## 4 | Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

### 4.1 | Discussion and Theoretical Implications

While the role of adopting relevant macro-foundational theory to frame specific micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entities is widely recognized in the (psychology and) marketing literature (e.g., Gupta et al. 2023), guidelines regarding how to choose a suitable macro-foundational theory for research impact remain notably absent to date. Addressing this gap, we propose a set of six guidelines (i.e., *Interestingness*, *Matching*, *Parsimony*, *Applicability*, *Conceptual rigor*, and *Testability*), of which we propose *Matching* as the core action item for researchers. We then invite researchers to use the remaining five guidelines to assess the quality of their *Matching* for research impact, as discussed further below.

First, under elevated *Matching* of the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and the chosen macro-foundational theory (see Table 2), research impact is expected to rise. However, as different macro-foundational theories offer differing levels of fit to the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity and will highlight distinct aspects of or nuances in it, researchers are advised to initially link *different* macro-foundational theories to the examined micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity to identify the most appropriate theory, or that, which generates the most *interesting*, meaningful insight (MacInnis 2011). This process of macro-foundational theory-related *trial and error* ensures that the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity is first examined from differing perspectives, helping researchers select the most promising theory, while also reducing the risk of theoretical myopia (Levitt 1960).

Second, we propose the five remaining guidelines (i.e., *Interestingness*, *Parsimony*, *Applicability*, *Conceptual rigor*, and *Testability*) as key evaluative criteria for authors' proposed *Matching*. One, to ensure *Interestingness* (see Table 2), researchers may conduct (a) test-run(s) in which they link a specific macro-foundational theory's attributes to the studied micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entity, followed by an

assessment of the *Interestingness* of these analyses (Tsang 2022). They may also repeat this process using several macro-foundational theories to determine which theory generates the most worthwhile findings. Two, *Parsimony* reflects the extent to which a *Matching* process uses the fewest possible assumptions or variables to adequately explain an outcome (Gunitsky 2019; see Table 2). Authors are advised to adopt *balanced Parsimony* (Steward et al. 2024), including by excluding theoretically redundant (e.g., duplicate or superfluous) elements, while at the same time ensuring comprehensive coverage of the relevant core theoretical constituents (Tellis 2017). In other words, researchers should not take their quest for parsimony as far as to *cut theoretical corners* (e.g., by omitting key attributes of the chosen macro-foundational theory), which would compromise the *Conceptual rigor* of their *Matching* (Houston 2019).

Three, to safeguard *Applicability* (see Table 2), we advise researchers to select research questions that have direct relevance to managerial (marketing) practice, requiring a good sense of contemporary (business) trends coupled with strong theorizing skills (Weick 1995; MacInnis 2011). Four, *Conceptual rigor* (see Table 2) is of the essence for *Matching*, as illustrated in Table 3. For example, clear conceptualization, articulation, and clarification of the studied theoretical entities is a *sine qua non* in high-quality *Matching* processes. Finally, *Testability* refers to the degree to which theoretical *Matching* can be empirically tested (see Table 2), whether in the study at hand (for empirical work) or in future research (for purely conceptual work; Fried 2020; Kardes et al. 2022). To facilitate *Testability*, we recommend authors to position their analyses within rigorous prior literature (e.g., by using widely validated measurement scales).

### 4.2 | Managerial Implications

While this article is primarily intended for an academic audience, it also generates important implications for managers. First, the proposed IMPACT guidelines and organizing framework are expected to improve managerial understanding of the interface of specific macro-foundational theory and particular micro- or meso-theoretical entities (Storbacka et al. 2016). Specifically, illuminating business issues through the lens of different theories will highlight distinct aspects or foci of these, helping practitioners develop a better-rounded, more holistic understanding of marketing phenomena. For example, while exploration of employees' interactions with customers from an S-D logic perspective may center on understanding specific actors' value cocreation processes (Vargo and Lusch 2017), the

adoption of a social exchange theory lens would facilitate assessments of these stakeholders' perceived role-related costs/benefits and potential self-interested behaviors (Blau 1964).

Second and relatedly, this article may help practitioners better understand the use of macro-foundational theory to frame specific micro- or meso-foundational theoretical entities in published research, allowing them to leverage specific scholarly findings in their organization. The proposed guideline of *Applicability* is particularly important, given its inherent managerial relevance (Schauerte et al. 2023). To safeguard *Applicability*, managers and scholars are encouraged to consult and collaborate on important (e.g., transformative) business issues, including how to leverage new technology (e.g., AI; Fu et al. 2024), improve or optimize firm responsibility (e.g., through policies focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion; Septianto et al. 2023), and manage the firm's triple bottom-line performance (Kumar et al. 2025), among others.

### 4.3 | Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contribution, this article is also subject to limitations that raise pertinent research opportunities. First, the purely conceptual nature of the proposed IMPACT guidelines and the organizing framework warrants their respective empirical exploration and validation. For example, scholars may pinpoint the relative importance of the framework's components, assess how they operate vis-à-vis one another, or examine key interactions between them to further augment acumen of theory selection for research IMPACT.

Another important area for further investigation lies in the development and potential commercialization of objective (e.g., AI-based) instruments (e.g., indices) to quantify the proposed guidelines. Here, it is pivotal to ensure the relative objectivity of such measures (e.g., by using AI-based software that is able to assign *Interestingness*, etc. scores to particular manuscripts), allowing researchers to improve salient parts of their work based on these. However, authors' self-reported scores (e.g., by them assessing their own work) should be avoided to minimize potential (e.g., self-assessment) bias (e.g., Kim et al. 2016). Once developed, such (e.g., AI-based) measures for the guidelines may also be applied in the peer review process, potentially raising its comprehensiveness and/or objectivity.

Second, while our analyses reflect a traditional "theory-first" research approach (i.e., by first choosing a suitable macro-foundational theory to guide the examined micro/meso-foundational entity; Vargo and Lusch 2017), some scholars argue for an "empirics-first" approach. For example, Golder et al. (2023) advocate conducting empirics-first studies that originate from real marketing phenomena or observations, which – by drawing on empirical data – produce relevant insight *without* starting with the theory. An alleged benefit of this approach is that it is not limited by any predetermined biases, preconceptions, or constraints that are inherent in theory-first research (Kumar 2018). Against this backdrop, further examination of the proposed framework based on theory (vs. empirics) first approaches is recommended.

### Acknowledgments

The lead author acknowledges a discussion with Brodie et al. (2016) on customer/actor engagement and theoretical foundations, among others.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

### References

- Ariew, R. 1976. *Ockham's Razor: A Historical and Philosophical Analysis of Ockham's Principle of Parsimony*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois.
- Bacharach, S. B. 1989. "Organizational Theories: Some Criteria for Evaluation." *The Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 4: 496–515.
- Bagozzi, R. P. 1984. "A Prospectus for Theory Construction in Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 48, no. 1: 11–29.
- Ball, P. 2016. "The Tyranny of Simple Explanations." In *The Atlantic*, August.
- Barnett, L. 2005. *The Universe and Dr. Dover*: Einstein.
- Bartels, R. 1968. "The General Theory of Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 32, no. 1: 29–33.
- Bass, F. M. 1995. "Empirical Generalizations and Marketing Science: A Personal View." *Marketing Science* 14, no. 3: G6–G19.
- Birken, S. A., B. J. Powell, C. M. Shea, et al. 2017. "Criteria for Selecting Implementation Science Theories and Frameworks: Results from An International Survey." *Implementation Science* 12: 124. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-017-0656-y>.
- Blau, P. 1964. *Power and Exchange in Social Life*. New York: Free Press.
- Bozkurt, S., D. Gligor, and L. Hollebeek. 2021. "Ethnicity's Effect on Social Media-Based Comment Intention: Comparing Minority and Majority Consumers." *Psychology & Marketing* 38, no. 11: 1895–1910.
- Brodie, R., J. Fehrer, J. Conduit, E. Jaakkola, and L. Hollebeek. 2016. "From Customer to Actor Engagement: Exploring a Broadened Conceptual Domain." In 45th European Marketing Academy Conference, Oslo, May 24–27.
- Brodie, R., L. Hollebeek, A. Ilic, and B. Juric. 2011. "Customer Engagement: Conceptual Domain, Fundamental Propositions & Implications for Research In Service Marketing." *Journal of Service Research* 14, no. 3: 252–271.
- Brodie, R., and L. Peters. 2020. "New Directions for Service Research: Refreshing the Process of Theorizing to Increase Contribution." *Journal of Services Marketing* 34, no. 3: 415–428.
- Carnevale, M., D. Luna, and D. Lerman. 2017. "Brand Linguistics: A Theory-Driven Framework for the Study of Language In Branding." *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 34, no. 2: 572–591.
- Chaiken, S., K. L. Duckworth, and P. Darke. 1999. "When Parsimony Fails." *Psychological Inquiry* 10, no. 2: 118–123.
- Chan, K. C., P. Lai, and K. Liano. 2012. "A Threshold Citation Analysis in Marketing Research." *European Journal of Marketing* 46, no. 1/2: 134–156.
- Coleman, J. 1994. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press.
- Cornelissen, J. P., and R. Durand. 2014. "Moving Forward: Developing Theoretical Contributions In Management Studies." *Journal of Management Studies* 51, no. 6: 995–1022.



- Cronbach, L. J. 1975. "Beyond the Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology." *American Psychologist* 30, no. Feb: 116–127.
- Davis, M. S. 1971. "That's Interesting!: Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 1, no. 2: 309–344.
- Deshpande, R. 1983. "Paradigms Lost: on Theory and Method In Research in Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 47, no. 4: 101–110.
- Donthu, N., S. Kumar, D. Pattnaik, and W. Lim. 2021. "A Bibliometric Retrospection of Marketing From the Lens of Psychology: Insights from Psychology & Marketing." *Psychology & Marketing* 38, no. 5: 834–865.
- Van Doorn, J., M. Mende, S. M. Noble, et al. 2017. "Domoarigato Mr. Roboto: Emergence of Automated Social Presence in Organizational Frontlines and Customers' Service Experiences." *Journal of Service Research* 20, no. 1: 43–58.
- Dorobantu, S., M. Gruber, D. Ravasi, and N. Wellman. 2024. "The AMJ Management Research Canvas: A Tool for Conducting and Reporting Empirical Research." *Academy of Management Journal* 67, no. 5: 1163–1174.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., and M. E. Graebner. 2007. "Theory Building From Cases: Opportunities and Challenges." *Academy of Management Journal* 50, no. 1: 25–32.
- Farah, M., Z. Ramadan, and Y. Nassereldine. 2024. "When Digital Spaces Matter: The Influence of Uniqueness and Place Attachment on Self-Identity Expression with Brands Using Generative AI on the Metaverse." *Psychology & Marketing* 41, no. 12: 2965–2976.
- Felin, T., N. J. Foss, and R. E. Ployhart. 2015. "The Microfoundations Movement in Strategy and Organization Theory." *Academy of Management Annals* 9, no. 1: 575–632.
- Ferdous, A., H. Akareem, M. Viswanathan, and A. Ringer. 2024. "Boosting App-Based Mobile Financial Services Engagement in B2B Subsistence Marketplaces: The Roles of Marketing Strategy and App Design." In *Industrial Marketing Management* 119, no. May: 147–161.
- Ferrell, O. C., and L. Ferrell. 2024. "Building a Better World: The Role of AI Ethics and Social Responsibility." *Journal of Macromarketing* 44, no. 4: 928–935.
- Fournier, S. 1998. "Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research." *Journal of Consumer Research* 24, no. 4: 343–353.
- Fried, E. I. 2020. "Theories and Models: What They Are, What They Are For, and What They Are About." *Psychological inquiry* 31, no. 4: 336–344.
- Fu, Y., D. Dose, and R. Dimitriu. 2024. "Gift Giving in the Age of AI: The Role of Social Closeness in Using AI Gift Recommendation Tools." *Psychology & Marketing* 41, no. 10: 2214–2238.
- Giertz, J. N., L. D. Hollebeek, W. H. Weiger, and M. Hammerschmidt. 2022. "The Invisible Leash: When Human Brands Hijack Corporate Brands' Consumer Relationships." *Journal of Service Management* 33, no. 3: 485–495.
- Glick, W. H., C. C. Miller, and L. B. Cardinal. 2007. "Making a Life in the Field of Organization Science." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 28: 817–835.
- Gnyawali, D., and Y. Song. 2016. "Pursuit of Rigor in Research: Illustration From Coopetition Literature." *Industrial Marketing Management* 57, no. Aug: 12–22.
- Golder, P. N., M. G. Dekimpe, J. T. An, H. J. van Heerde, D. S. U. Kim, and J. W. Alba. 2023. "Learning from Data: An Empirics-First Approach to Relevant Knowledge Generation." *Journal of Marketing* 87, no. 3: 319–336.
- Gouldner, A. W. 1957. "Theoretical Requirements of the Applied Social Sciences." *American Sociological Review* 22, no. 1: 92–102.
- Gruber, T. 2014. "Academic Sell-Out: How An Obsession With Metrics and Rankings Is Damaging Academia." *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 24, no. 2: 165–177.
- Gunitsky, S. 2019. "Rival Visions of Parsimony." *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 3: 707–716.
- Gupta, S., P. Danaher, V. Mittal, and M. Morrin. 2023. "A Manuscript's Journey Through Peer Review: Insights from Almost 3,000 Editorial Decisions at the Journal of Marketing Research." *Journal of Marketing Research* 60, no. 5: 835–846.
- Hand, M. 2010. "On the Worthwhileness of Theoretical Activities." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. s1: 109–121.
- Hanssens, D. M. 2018. "The Value of Empirical Generalizations in Marketing." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 46: 6–8.
- Harrison, P. 2009. "Evaluating Artistic Work: Balancing Competing Perspectives." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 12, no. 3: 265–274.
- Van Hierden, Y., T. Dietrich, and S. Rundle-Thiele. 2022. "BUILD: A Five-Step Process to Develop Theory-Driven Social Marketing Interventions." *Journal of Social Marketing* 12, no. 4: 473–494.
- Hollebeek, L., V. Kumar, R. K. Srivastava, and M. Clark. 2023. "Moving the Stakeholder Journey Forward." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 51: 23–49.
- Hollebeek, L., M. Sarstedt, C. Menidjel, D. Sprott, and S. Urbonavicius. 2023. "Hallmarks and Potential Pitfalls of Customer- and Consumer Engagement Scales: A Systematic Review." *Psychology & Marketing* 40, no. 6: 1074–1088.
- Hollebeek, L., R. Srivastava, M. Clark, S. Urbonavicius, and W. Lim. 2024. "Crafting Conceptual Proposition-Based Contributions: The 7C Framework." *Psychology & Marketing* 41, no. 10: 2396–2411.
- Hollebeek, L. D., D. E. Sprott, and M. K. Brady. 2021. "Rise of the Machines? Customer Engagement in Automated Service Interactions." *Journal of Service Research* 24, no. 1: 3–8.
- Homer, S., and W. Lim. 2024. "Theory Development in a Globalized World: Bridging 'doing as the Romans do' With 'understanding why the Romans do it'." *Global Business and Organizational Excellence* 43, no. 3: 127–138.
- Houston, M. B. 2019. "Four Facets of Rigor." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 47: 570–573.
- Hughes, T., D. Bence, L. Grisoni, N. O'Regan, and D. Wornham. 2012. "Marketing as An Applied Science: Lessons From Other Business Disciplines." *European Journal of Marketing* 46, no. 1/2: 92–111.
- Hughes, T., M. Stone, E. Aravopoulou, L. Wright, and L. Machtynger. 2018. "Academic Research into Marketing: Many Publications, but Little Impact?" *Cogent Business & Management* 5, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2018.1516108>.
- Hulland, J. 2019. "In Through the out Door." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 47: 1–3.
- Hulland, J. 2020. "Conceptual Review Papers: Revisiting Existing Research to Develop and Refine Theory." *AMS Review* 10: 27–35.
- Hunt, S. D. 1983. "General Theories and the Fundamental Explananda of Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 47, no. 4: 9–17.
- Hunt, S. D. 1993. "Objectivity in Marketing Theory and Research." *Journal of Marketing* 57, no. 2: 76–91.
- Jaakkola, E., and S. L. Vargo. 2021. "Assessing and Enhancing the Impact Potential of Marketing Articles." *AMS Review* 11: 407–415.
- James, P., and M. B. Steger. 2021. "Globalization in Question: Why Does Engaged Theory Matter?" *Globalizations* 18, no. 5: 794–809.
- Jaworski, B. J. 2011. "on Managerial Relevance." *Journal of Marketing* 75, no. 4: 211–224.
- Jennings, M. 1994. "Business School's Formula for Irrelevance." *Wall Street Journal*, November 29, A18.
- Kardes, F., E. Fischer, S. Spiller, et al. 2022. "Commentaries on 'Abductive Theory Construction'." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 32: 194–207. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1279>.



- Karpen, I. O., L. L. Bove, B. A. Lukas, and M. J. Zyphur. 2015. "Service-Dominant Orientation: Measurement and Impact on Performance Outcomes." *Journal of Retailing* 91, no. 1: 89–108.
- Kim, Y. H., H. Kwon, J. Lee, and C. Y. Chiu. 2016. "Why Do People Overestimate or Underestimate Their Abilities? A Cross-Culturally Valid Model of Cognitive and Motivational Processes in Self-Assessment Biases." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 47, no. 9: 1201–1216.
- Kohli, A. K., and M. Haenlein. 2021. "Factors Affecting the Study of Important Marketing Issues: Implications and Recommendation." *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 38: 1–11.
- Kumar, V. 2015. "Evolution of Marketing as a Discipline: What Has Happened and What to Look out For." *Journal of Marketing* 79, no. 1: 1–9.
- Kumar, V. 2017a. "Integrating Theory and Practice in Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 81, no. 2: 1–7.
- Kumar, V. 2017b. "The Role of University Research Centers in Producing Scholarly Research." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45, no. 4: 453–458.
- Kumar, V. 2018. "A Theory of Customer Valuation: Concepts, Metrics, Strategy, and Implementation." *Journal of Marketing* 82, no. 1: 1–19.
- Kumar, V., A. Sharma, and S. Gupta. 2017. "Assessing the Influence of Strategic Marketing Research on Generating Impact: Moderating Roles of Models, Journals, and Estimation Approaches." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45, no. 2: 164–185.
- Kumar, V., L. Hollebeek, A. Sharma, B. Rajan, and R. Srivastava. 2025. "Responsible Stakeholder Engagement Marketing." *Journal of Business Research*: 115143.
- Lee, H., and Y. Yi. 2022. "The Impact of Self-Service Versus Interpersonal Contact on Customer–Brand Relationship In the Time of Frontline Technology Infusion." *Psychology & Marketing* 39, no. 5: 906–920.
- Lehmann, D. R., L. McAlister, and R. Staelin. 2011. "Sophistication in Research In Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 75, no. 4: 155–165.
- Leong, F., N. Schmitt, and B. Lyons (2023). Developing Testable and Important Research Questions. In: H. Cooper, M., Coutanche, L., McMullen, A., Panter, D., Rindskopf, K. & Sher, J. (Eds.), *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology: Foundations, Planning, Measures, and Psychometrics* (2e), 135–150.
- Levitt, T. 1960. "Marketing Myopia." *Harvard Business Review*, July/August, 45–56.
- Lewin, K. 1943. "Psychology and the Process of Group Living." *Journal of Social Psychology* 17, no. 1: 113–131.
- Lewin, K. 1945. "The Research Center for Group Dynamics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology." *Sociometry* 8: 126–135.
- Lim, W. M. 2025. "Publish and Prosper: Mindfully Embracing the Middle Ground." *Annals of Tourism Research* 110: 103885.
- Lindgreen, A., C. A. Di Benedetto, R. J. Brodie, and M. Van Der Borgh. 2020. "How to Undertake Great Cross-Disciplinary Research." *Industrial Marketing Management* 90, no. Oct: A1–A5.
- Lindgreen, A., C. A. Di Benedetto, A. H. Clarke, M. R. Ewald, N. Bjørn-Andersen, and D. M. Lambert. 2021. "How to Define, Identify, and Measure Societal Value." *Industrial Marketing Management* 97, no. Aug: A1–A13.
- Maass, W., J. Parsons, S. Purao, V. Storey, and C. Woo (2018). Data-Driven Meets Theory-driven Research in the Era of Big Data: Opportunities and Challenges for Information Systems Research, 19(12). <https://aisel.aisnet.org/jais/vol19/iss12/1/>.
- MacInnis, D. J. 2011. "A Framework for Conceptual Contributions in Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 75, no. 4: 136–154.
- MacKenzie, S. B. 2003. "The Dangers of Poor Construct Conceptualization." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 31, no. 3: 323–326.
- Madhavaram, S. 2024. "Chartering Marketing Strategy and Marketing Management Research Toward Greater Relevance and Impact." *Journal of Business Research* 178, no. May: 114667.
- Mahajan, G., V. Kumar, M. Tregua, and R. Bruni. 2023. "Value Dominant Logic: Organizational Principles." *European Journal of Marketing* 57, no. 5: 1245–1271.
- Malär, L., and A. Giuffredi-Kähr. 2024. "The Dark Triad of Brand Personality: Scale Development and Validation." *Psychology & Marketing* 41, no. 11: 2728–2740. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22081>.
- Malhotra, N., D. Nunan, and D. Birks. 2020. *Marketing Research* (6e). Pearson.
- Mariani, M., R. Perez-Vega, and J. Wirtz. 2022. "AI in Marketing, Consumer Research and Psychology: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda." *Psychology & Marketing* 39, no. 4: 755–776.
- McKenna, H. 2021. "Research Impact: The What, Why, When and How." In *Research Impact*, edited by H. McKenna. Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57028-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57028-6_1).
- Mele, C., L. Hollebeek, I. DiBernardo, and T. Russo-Spena. 2025. "Unravelling the Customer Journey: A Conceptual Framework and Research Agenda." *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 21: 123916.
- Midgley, D. F. 1984. "Parsimony or Explanation: on the Estimation of Systems Defined by Nonlinear Differential Equations." *Journal of Consumer Research* 10, no. 4: 445–448.
- Mikalef, P., K. Conboy, J. E. Lundström, and A. Popovič. 2022. "Thinking Responsibly about Responsible AI and 'The Dark Side' of AI." *European Journal of Information Systems* 31, no. 3: 257–268.
- Mkhomazi, S., and T. Iyamu (2013). A Guide to Selecting Theory to Underpin Information Systems Studies. *International Working Conference on Transfer and Diffusion of IT*, June. Bangalore, 525–537.
- Moed, H. F., and G. Halevi. 2015. "Multidimensional Assessment of Scholarly Research Impact." *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 66, no. 10: 1988–2002.
- Moorman, C., H. J. Van Heerde, C. P. Moreau, and R. W. Palmatier. 2019. "Challenging the Boundaries of Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 83, no. 5: 1–4.
- Moorthy, K. S. 1993. "Theoretical Modeling in Marketing." *Journal of Marketing* 57, no. 2: 92–106.
- Murray, J. B., D. J. Evers, and S. Janda. 1995. "Marketing, Theory Borrowing, and Critical Reflection." *Journal of Macromarketing* 15, no. 2: 92–106.
- Nelson, M. R., C. D. Ham, and R. Ahn. 2017. "Knowledge Flows Between Advertising and Other Disciplines: A Social Exchange Perspective." *Journal of Advertising* 46, no. 2: 309–332.
- Nunamaker, J. F., N. W. Twyman, J. S. Giboney, and R. O. Briggs. 2017. "Creating High-Value Real-World Impact Through Systematic Programs of Research." *MIS Quarterly* 41, no. 2: 335–351.
- Ozanne, J., B. Davis, J. Murray, S. Grier, A. Benmecheddal, et al. 2017. "Assessing the Societal Impact of Research: The Relational Engagement Approach." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 36, no. 1: 1–14.
- Palmatier, R. W. 2017. "Marketing Research Centers: Community, Productivity, and Relevance." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45: 465–466.
- Palmatier, R., M. Houston, and J. Hulland. 2018. "Review Articles: Purpose, Process, and Structure." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 46, no. 1: 1–5.
- Parasuraman, A., V. Zeithaml, and L. Berry. 1988. "Servqual: A Multi-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality." *Journal of Retailing* 64, no. Spring: 12–40.
- Pedersen, C. 2021. "Empathy-Based Marketing." *Psychology & Marketing* 38, no. 3: 470–480.

- Popper, K. 1934. *Logik der Forschung*. Springer.
- Reale, E., D. Avramov, K. Canhial, et al. 2018. "A Review of Literature on Evaluating the Scientific, Social and Political Impact of Social Sciences and Humanities Research." *Research Evaluation* 27, no. 4: 298–308.
- Reibstein, D. J., G. Day, and J. Wind. 2009. "Guest Editorial: Is Marketing Academia Losing Its Way?" *Journal of Marketing* 73, no. Jul: 1–3.
- Roberts, J. H., U. Kayande, and S. Stremersch. 2014. "From Academic Research to Marketing Practice: Exploring the Marketing Science Value Chain." *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 31, no. 2: 127–140.
- Roberts, S., and H. Pashler. 2000. "How Persuasive Is a Good Fit? A Comment on Theory Testing." *Psychological Review* 107, no. 2: 358–367.
- Van Rooij, I., and G. Baggio. 2020. "Theory Development Requires An Epistemological Sea Change." *Psychological inquiry* 31, no. 4: 321–325.
- Roozeboom, W. 1991. "Conceptual Rigor: Where Is It?" *Theory & Psychology* 1, no. 3: 383–388.
- Roy, S. K., G. Singh, L. D. Hollebeek, et al. 2024. "Smart Service Value: Conceptualization, Scale Development, and Validation." *Technovation* 137, no. Sep: 103097.
- Sandberg, J., and M. Alvesson. 2011. "Ways of Constructing Research Questions: Gap-Spotting or Problematisation?" *Organization* 18, no. 1: 23–44.
- Sawhney, M., G. Verona, and E. Prandelli. 2005. "Collaborating to Create: The Internet as a Platform for Customer Engagement in Product Innovation." *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 19, no. 4: 4–17.
- Schauerte, N., M. Becker, M. Imschloss, J. R. K. Wichmann, and W. J. Reinartz. 2023. "The Managerial Relevance of Marketing Science: Properties and Genesis." *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 40, no. 4: 801–822.
- Septianto, F., F. Mathmann, L. D. Hollebeek, and E. T. Higgins. 2023. "Leveraging Social Media Advertising to Foster Female Consumers' Empowerment and Engagement: The Role of Regulatory Mode." *Journal of Advertising* 52, no. 5: 688–705.
- Sheth, J. (2017). The Future History of Consumer Research: Will the Discipline Rise to the Opportunity? *Advances in Consumer Research*, Association for Consumer Research: Urbana, Vol. 45, 17–20.
- Shrivastava, P. 1987. "Rigor and Practical Usefulness of Research in Strategic Management." *Strategic Management Journal* 8, no. Jan/Feb: 77–92.
- Shugan, S. M. 2003. "Editorial: Defining Interesting Research Problems." *Marketing Science* 22, no. 1: 1–15.
- Smith, D. C. 2003. "The Importance and Challenges of Being Interesting." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 31, no. 3: 319–322.
- Snyder, H. 2019. "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines." *Journal of Business Research* 104: 333–339.
- Sober, E. 1981. "The Principle of Parsimony." *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 32, no. 2: 145–156.
- Sprott, D., L. Hollebeek, V. Sigurdsson, M. Clark, and S. Urbonavicius. 2025. "Avatars' Phygital Social Presence In the Metaverse: An Engaged Theory Perspective." *Psychology & Marketing* 42, no. 6: 1528–1540.
- Sternberg, R. J., and T. Gordeeva. 1996. "The Anatomy of Impact: What Makes An Article Influential?" *Psychological Science* 7, no. 2: 69–75.
- Steward, R., P. Chopin, and P. Verburg. 2024. "Supporting Spatial Planning With a Novel Method Based on Participatory Bayesian Networks: An Application in Curaçao." *Environmental Science & Policy* 156, no. Jun: 103733.
- Storbacka, K., R. Brodie, T. Böhmman, P. Maglio, and S. Nenonen. 2016. "Actor Engagement as a Microfoundation for Value Co-Creation." *Journal of Business Research* 69, no. 8: 3008–3017.
- Stremersch, S. 2021. "The Study of Important Marketing Issues: Reflections." *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 38, no. 1: 12–17.
- Stremersch, S., I. Verniers, and P. C. Verhoef. 2007. "The Quest for Citations: Drivers of Article Impact." *Journal of Marketing* 71, no. 3: 171–193.
- Suddaby, R. 2010. "Editor's Comments: Construct Clarity in Theories of Management and Organization." *Academy of Management Review* 35, no. 3: 346–357.
- Sutton, R. I., and B. M. Staw. 1995. "What Theory Is Not." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40: 371–384.
- Tellis, G. J. 2017. "Interesting and Impactful Research: on Phenomena, Theory, and Writing." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45, no. 1: 1–6.
- Tian, K. T., W. O. Bearden, and G. L. Hunter. 2001. "Consumers' Need for Uniqueness: Scale Development and Validation." *Journal of Consumer Research* 28, no. Jun: 50–66.
- Tikir, A., and B. Lehmann. 2011. "Climate Change, Theory of Planned Behavior and Values: A Structural Equation Model With Mediation Analysis." *Climatic Change* 104: 389–402.
- Tsang, E. W. K. 2022. "That's Interesting! A Flawed Article Has Influenced Generations of Management Researchers." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 31, no. 2: 150–164.
- Uлага, W., M. Kleinaltenkamp, V. Kashyap, and A. Eggert. 2021. "Advancing Marketing Theory and Practice: Guidelines for Crafting Research Propositions." *AMS Review* 11: 395–406.
- Varadarajan, P. R. 2003. "Musings on Relevance and Rigor of Scholarly Research in Marketing." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 31, no. 4: 368–376.
- Varadarajan, R. 2017. "Musings on Interesting and Impactful Theory and Research." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45: 10–13.
- Vargo, S. L., and R. F. Lusch. 2017. "Service-Dominant Logic 2025." *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 34: 46–67.
- Van De Ven, A. H. 1989. "Nothing Is Quite so Practical as a Good Theory." *Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 4: 486–489.
- Vergne, J. P., and R. Durand. 2010. "The Missing Link Between the Theory and Empirics of Path Dependence: Conceptual Clarification, Testability Issue, and Methodological Implications." *Journal of Management Studies* 47, no. 4: 736–759.
- Villeneuve, P. 2024. "Choosing theory and frameworks." In *An Introductory Guide to Qualitative Research at Art Museums*, edited by A. Love and D. Randolph. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429262326>.
- Wang, L., E. Chan, and A. Gohary. 2025. "When Disease Concerns Divide: How Out-Group Classification Reduces Satisfaction with Service Robots." *Psychology & Marketing*, ahead of print, June 5. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22247>.
- Weick, K. E. 1995. "What Theory Is Not, Theorizing Is." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40, no. 3: 385–390.
- Weiger, W., M. Hammerschmidt, and J. Giertz. 2025. "Blurred Lines? Disentangling the Roles of Consumers' Influencer and Brand Engagement In Shaping Brand Performance." *Journal of Business Research* 194, no. May: 115280.
- Whetten, D. A. 1989. "What Constitutes a Theoretical Contribution?" *The Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 4: 490–495.
- Wierenga, B. (2021). The Study of Important Marketing Issues in an Evolving Field. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 38, 18–28.
- Wolf, T., S. Jahn, M. Hammerschmidt, and W. H. Weiger. 2021. "Competition Versus Cooperation: How Technology-Facilitated Social

Interdependence Initiates the Self-Improvement Chain.” *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 38, no. 2: 472–491.

Woodside, A. G., and R. Baxter. 2013. “Achieving Accuracy, Generalization-to-Contexts, and Complexity in Theories of Business-To-Business Decision Processes.” *Industrial Marketing Management* 42, no. 3: 382–393.

Yadav, M. S. 2010. “The Decline of Conceptual Articles and Implications for Knowledge Development.” *Journal of Marketing* 74, no. 1: 1–19.

Yi, Y., and T. Gong. 2013. “Customer Value Co-Creation Behavior: Scale Development and Validation.” *Journal of Business Research* 66, no. 9: 1279–1284.

Yonkers, V. 2020. “Creating Theoretic Boundaries for the Study of Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies: A Framework for Choosing Theory.” *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 2: 401–409. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.210>.

Zaltman, G., K. LeMasters, and M. Heffring. 1985. *Theory Construction in Marketing: Some Thoughts on Thinking*. New York: Wiley.

Zeithaml, V. A., B. J. Jaworski, A. K. Kohli, K. R. Tuli, W. Ulaga, and G. Zaltman. 2020. “A Theories-In-Use Approach to Building Marketing Theory.” *Journal of Marketing* 84, no. 1: 32–51.

## Appendix

### Illustrative Cases - Proposed IMPACT Guidelines

|                                   | Sprott et al. (2025): Engaged theory ( <a href="https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mar.22191">https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mar.22191</a> )  | Wang et al. (2025): Social categorization theory ( <a href="https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.22247">https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.22247</a> )   |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Synopsis</b>                   | The authors apply engaged theory’s key constituents of <i>ways of being</i> , <i>ways of acting</i> , and <i>ways of relating</i> to develop the proposed concept of metaverse avatars’ phygital social presence (PSP). PSP comprises an avatar’s human <i>and</i> automated social presence, which – while having received prior investigation individually – have largely been examined as mutually exclusive concepts. However, the authors integrate human and automated social presence to develop PSP in the context of metaverse avatars.  | Prior research suggests that consumers’ disease concerns (e.g., of contracting H1N1 or COVID-19) will increase their receptivity to using service robots. However, drawing on social categorization theory, the authors show that when disease concerns are salient, consumers are less (vs. more) satisfied with service robots because disease concerns lead them to classify anthropomorphized robots as out-group members, triggering their avoidance (vs. approach) responses, thus challenging existing assumptions.   |
| <b>Proposed IMPACT guidelines</b> |   |  |
| <i>Interestingness</i>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Novelty of the application of the theory to the research topic</i>: The authors present the first known application of engaged theory to consumer/user engagement in marketing (MacInnis 2011), from which they develop the PSP concept. PSP comprises both human and automated social presence, which have largely existed in isolation to date (e.g., Van Doorn et al. 2017).</li> <li>o <i>Contextual novelty or uniqueness</i>: The authors embed their analyses in the metaverse context, which – owing to its relative newness (Farah et al. 2024) – offers novel, interesting insight.</li> <li>o <i>Thought-provoking findings</i>: Engaged theory’s key elements of <i>ways of being</i>, <i>ways of acting</i>, and <i>ways of relating</i> (e.g., James and Steger 2021) offer unique new insight into the PSP of avatars in the metaverse. e.g., while <i>ways of being</i> primarily illuminate their</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Novelty of the application of the theory to the research topic</i>: This study applies social categorization theory to refute the commonly held view that consumers prefer using service robots (vs. interact with human staff) when disease concerns are present (Tellis 2017). The authors state on p. 11: “This [finding] challenges the assumption that heightened health concerns should increase consumer preference for robotic services, instead highlighting the role of social perception in consumer-robot interactions.”</li> <li>o <i>Contextual novelty or uniqueness</i>: The analyses are embedded in the context of service robots in the hospitality sector. Given the relatively recent arrival of service robots in marketing and the lack of current insight into their dynamics (e.g., Mele et al. 2025), this may be deemed an <i>Interesting</i> context to apply the chosen theory in.</li> </ul> |

(Continues)

|                  | Sprott et al. (2025): Engaged theory ( <a href="https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mar.22191">https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mar.22191</a> )  | Wang et al. (2025): Social categorization theory ( <a href="https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.22247">https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.22247</a> )   |
|------------------|---|--|
|                  | automated social presence, <i>ways of acting</i> chiefly denote their human social presence.  | o <i>Thought-provoking findings</i> : The results are <i>Interesting</i> , because they repudiate or disprove prior insight, generating significant implications for psychology and marketing theory development (e.g., by raising further research questions) and managers (e.g., by influencing the design/application of service robots).   |
| Matching         | o <i>Theoretical co-infusion</i> : The authors co-infuse (Schauerte et al. 2023; Hollebeek et al. 2024) the theoretical characteristics of consumer/user engagement (e.g., its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral nature and positive vs. negative valence) with those of engaged theory (i.e., its <i>ways of being</i> , <i>ways of acting</i> , and <i>ways of relating</i> ), which are both linked to the literature-based concepts of human and automated social presence. The authors integrate these to develop PSP.<br>o For example, P1 reads (p. 1533): “An avatar’s favorably (unfavorably) perceived human social presence [i.e., developed based on engaged theory’s ways of acting] primarily drives the development of other metaverse users’ positive (negative) behavioral engagement in their metaverse interactions.” | o <i>Theoretical co-infusion</i> : The authors infuse the tenets of social categorization theory with the concept of anthropomorphized service robots to attain findings that challenge existing assumptions or beliefs.<br>o For example, the authors state (pp. 1-2): “Across eight experiments, we provide empirical evidence that heightened disease concerns reduce satisfaction with service robots due to their classification as out-group members. These findings challenge the assumption that disease concerns should increase consumer preference for robotic services and instead highlight the role of social categorization in shaping human–robot interactions.” |
| Parsimony        | o <i>Comprehensive conciseness</i> : The article covers the required aspects of engaged theory, consumer/user engagement, and human/automated social presence without further elaboration on related issues (i.e., the analyses <i>stick to the point</i> ; Gunitsky 2019), safeguarding parsimony.<br>o The word or page limit that journals implement are designed to help authors remain parsimonious in their work.   | o <i>Comprehensive conciseness</i> : The authors cover the required aspects of social categorization theory (e.g., with users assigning service robots to their in- vs. out-group), without addressing other or related issues (Gunitsky 2019).<br>o e.g., Experiment 3 limits its focus to examining the effect of disease concerns on consumers’ classification of the service robot as their out-group, along with its effect on customer satisfaction (see Figure 1, p. 8).  |
| Applicability    | o <i>Managerial relevance</i> : The findings have relevance for brand managers and metaverse developers seeking to boost users’ PSP in specific metaverse environments. Specifically, the findings suggest the importance of nurturing users’ human <i>and</i> automated social presence.<br>o For example, the authors state on p. 1535: “We thus recommend managers to concurrently and synergistically develop and leverage both [human <i>and</i> automated] social presence... to optimize avatars’ PSP.”  | o <i>Managerial relevance</i> : The findings can be used in the design and implementation of service robots (e.g., by considering reducing the level of anthropomorphism of service robots).<br>o For example, the authors state on p. 12: “Experiment S2 suggests that reducing anthropomorphism in robot design could also improve satisfaction in contexts where disease concerns are heightened.”  |
| Conceptual rigor | o <i>Clear concept definition and explanation</i> : The authors define PSP (MacKenzie 2003) on p. 1532.<br>o <i>Systematic investigation</i> : e.g., the authors systematically address the key engaged theory facets vis-à-vis consumer/user engagement in the metaverse without omitting any important aspects.<br>o <i>Minimization of conceptual overlap</i> : Proposed analyses (e.g., a newly proposed concept or a set of propositions) should seek to address a unique  | o <i>Clear concept definition and explanation</i> : The authors state (p. 8): “We manipulated robot personality similarity to test whether making a robot more “like” the consumer would mitigate the negative impact of disease concerns on satisfaction.”<br>o <i>Systematic investigation</i> : Across 8 experiments, the authors systematically explore consumers’ responses to anthropomorphic service robots by drawing on social categorization theory.   |

(Continues)



|                    | <b>Sprott et al. (2025): Engaged theory (<a href="https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mar.22191">https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mar.22191</a>)</b>   | <b>Wang et al. (2025): Social categorization theory (<a href="https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.22247">https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.22247</a>)</b>  |
|--------------------|---|--|
|                    | conceptual scope (vs. invite conceptual overlap with that of others to minimize the risk of theoretical confounding).   | o <i>Minimization of conceptual overlap:</i> The reported studies address theoretically related but distinct issues relating to anthropomorphic service robots and their respective effect on specific dependent variables including customer satisfaction.  |
| <i>Testability</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Key findings can be tested empirically:</i> This purely conceptual article sets forth a set of testable propositions (i.e., propositions that are able to be tested) for or in further research (Leong et al. 2023).</li> <li>o e.g., P2 reads (p. 1534): “An avatar’s favorably (unfavorably) perceived automated social presence primarily drives the development of other metaverse users’ positive (negative) cognitive and emotional engagement in their metaverse interactions.”</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Key findings can be tested empirically:</i> The findings of this article, which empirically tests the hypothesized associations across 8 experiments, offer scope for further empirically testable analyses.</li> <li>o For example, the authors state on p. 12: “Future studies should explore these alternative mechanisms by introducing additional mediators, such as perceived risk, cognitive effort, or trust, to assess whether out-group classification acts alone or interacts with other psychological factors.”</li> </ul> |