

From Economic Roots to Digital Frontiers: A Chronological Narrative of Marketing Theory Evolution, 1886-2025

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Abstract: This paper explores the historical evolution of marketing theory through a narrative-based review supplemented by chronological cluster analysis. Analysing seminal works from 1886 to 2025, we identify five distinct developmental epochs in marketing theory: Economic Foundations (1886-1930s), Consumer Orientation (1936-1970s), Management Integration (1950s-1980s), Relationship Marketing (1980s-2000s), and Digital/Ethical Paradigms (2000s-2025). Our findings reveal how marketing theories develop through recurring mechanisms disciplinary integration, methodological innovation, environmental adaptation, and paradigm synthesis with varying emphasis across historical contexts. Drawing on recent scholarship from the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* and other leading publications, we identify critical transition points that catalysed theoretical development. The review surfaces significant historiographical gaps, particularly regarding non-Western marketing contexts, digital transformation genealogies, and ethical theory development. We propose a research agenda addressing these limitations through historical-critical methods, expanded cultural frameworks, and rhetorical history analysis. This study contributes to marketing history scholarship by providing an integrated narrative of theoretical evolution while offering pathways for future historical research that balances continuity with contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Marketing Theory, Theoretical Evolution, Rhetorical History, Historiography, Periodization, Marketing Thought, Chronological Cluster Analysis, Historical Narrative

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