

Abstract

Justice is a fundamental value in human life, which interfaces with multiple marketing issues. However, surprisingly, perception of justice has garnered scant attention hitherto in the marketing and consumer behavior literature. In contemporary society, with its advanced technologies and digital marketing media, new issues of justice have emerged that deserve close scientific scrutiny. The objective of this conceptual paper is to explore the domain of perception of (in)justice that might be related to marketing issues, to map the literature, conceptualize the domain, and point out new research avenues and opportunities in the field of marketing justice. To this end, a systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted, using automated textual analyses, focusing on work in the justice and allied disciplines published between January 2001 and April 2021. This procedure, coupled with a facet (meta)theoretical approach, revealed major elements for conceptualizing the sundry marketing aspects of justice. Indeed, the results show that marketing science and justice offer abundant opportunities for research on the interface between them. It is our hope, therefore, that the paper will stimulate a conversation in marketing scholarship on the hitherto largely overlooked role of justice perception in different marketing situations.

Introduction

Humans are endowed with an active sense of justice, which, as a basic template for organizing one's view of the world, governs, inter alia, judgments of political candidates, interpersonal relations, appraisals of the police and courts, and, most significantly for our purposes, marketing entities and activities (Jia et al., 2021, Mathur and Jain, 2020, Sabag and Schmitt, 2016). That said, distinct academic lacunas exist with respect to the influence of market justice perception (MJP) on various facets of market stakeholders (Hutton & Heath, 2020; Table 1).

This is rather surprising in view of the evidence that marketplace stakeholders (consumers, salespersons, retailers, suppliers, managers, organizations) often have strong emotional and behavioral reactions to perceived (in)justice of certain marketing practices. Moreover, recent studies have shown convincingly that market growth fueled by science, technology, and innovative development not only does not necessarily result in equality and poverty alleviation, but raises an array of new justice issues (Bouazzaoui et al., 2020, Graham and Hopkins, 2022). Thus, our research motivation stems in part from the fundamental observation that justice-related marketing practices seem to have outpaced marketing scholarship.

"Marketplace injustice can come in all sizes, shapes, and colors" (Williams & Henderson, 2012, p.185).

Justice theory (Rawls, 2003) and fairness theory (Folger & Shukla, 2019) help to explain the mechanisms that determine how many personal resources stakeholders are willing to invest in various commercial tasks. Closely related terms, justice and fairness are often used interchangeably. Rawls (2003) called his concept of social justice "justice as fairness." Fairness from this perspective means showing no bias towards others, while justice, in broader terms, involves giving a person their due. People, it is held, want fair treatment in all situations as they regard themselves as equals deserving of impartiality. There have, however, also been more distinct understandings of the two terms. While justice is normally used in reference to standards of rightness, fairness tends to have more to do with the capacity to judge without reference to one's own feelings or interests. Fairness has also been associated with the ability to make judgments that are not overly general but rather concrete and specific to a particular case (Adrians et al., 2021). At any rate, a notion of being treated as one deserves seems to lie at the core of how we conceive both justice and fairness. Significantly, both concepts have been applied in marketing and service research to understand customer reactions to service outcomes, most notably in the field of service recovery (Del Río-Lanza et al., 2009; Sparks & McColl-Kennedy, 2001).

Justice theory posits, for instance, that customer satisfaction and loyalty depend on whether customers believe a given service provider has treated them fairly and whether they feel they have obtained justice (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003). Numerous studies have demonstrated that perceived justice and fairness are important, multidimensional concepts, which have a bearing on market stakeholder satisfaction in various settings, ranging from traditional offline businesses such as banking and hospitality to modern businesses such as e-commerce and IT service companies (e.g., Graham & Hopkins, 2022). Furthermore, (in)justice concerns are rapidly gaining urgency as companies shift to Internet-based business models. This is due to two significant differences between the offline and e-commerce world. First, whereas in traditional commerce, justice perception tends to be shaped by interpersonal relations, business-customer relations online generally are bound, rather impersonally, to the service provider's website. Second, from a stakeholder's perspective, evaluating the fairness of a good or service tends to occur more rapidly online by virtue of the relatively instantaneous comparison of service providers and exchange of customer opinions that search engines and discussion boards allow. At the same time, increased use of advanced technologies and the shift to e-commerce have been accompanied by the ascendancy of business practices often considered unfair (e.g., RFID tracking, face recognition, reselling genetic data, etc.). Thus, while earlier research has focused on (in)justice in the context of service failure and recovery, or in specific settings such as the hospitality, transportation, and healthcare industries (e.g., Bowden, 2012), Nguyen and Klaus (2013), among others, have argued that concepts of fairness should expand to encompass service providers' honesty, integrity, transparency, and other ethical behavior. To address these, they have adopted a holistic view of fairness and developed a conceptual framework for general retail fairness.

In the ongoing debate about the conceptualization of justice, five dimensions of justice have been cited (e.g., Sabag & Schmitt, 2016). The first is *distributive justice*, which refers to the perceived fairness of outcomes; the second, *procedural justice*, which concerns the perceived fairness of the decision-making process, and the third, *interactional justice*, which has to do with the quality of the interpersonal interactions involved, while the fourth and fifth, *interpersonal justice* (i.e., ethical questions pertaining to dignity, respect and propriety) and *informational justice* (i.e., questions of equitable access to data and information and user interplay) are in effect subcategories of the third. However, researchers have not yet specified whether and how the aforementioned dimensions are related. Also, most marketing research has tended to focus on distributive justice, with limited treatment of procedural justice, while no studies were found on the importance of interactional and informational justice in marketing. In sum, it is clear from a review of the literature that an overall conceptualization of justice requires the combination of all five justice dimensions (Galligan & Yu, 2016).

Our paper seeks to address the conceptual gap outlined above by examining the marketing aspects of justice for future marketing research and practice. We share the view that marketing scholars ought to lay greater emphasis on conceptual work to generate big ideas and bring new concepts to light (e.g., Vargo & Koskela-Huotari, 2020). Accordingly, we adopted here the approach of Littell et al. (2008), which calls for scholars to "comprehensively locate and synthesize research that bears on a particular question, using organized, transparent, and replicable procedures at each step in the process" (p.22).

Specifically, we sought to advance four major objectives. The first was to provide a 'state-of-the-art' snapshot of the marketing-related domain of justice. In other words, by drawing insights from in-depth analyses in the extant literature, we hoped to identify what is known about key aspects of justice in marketing and consumption. The second aim was to formalize a conceptual MJP framework through the use of facet (meta)theory and its associated mapping sentence technique, while the third was to introduce the marketing community to facet (meta)theory (FT) as a methodology, at a time when FT has been enjoying a surge of scholarly attention, including a recent book by Hackett (2021), and a special issue on FT in *Frontiers in Psychology* (10/2019), to cite only two. Finally, we conceived the literature review and FT as a potential roadmap for future marketing research. Namely, we endeavored to draft a general blueprint that could be used by scientists and marketing managers to design marketing solutions aimed at alleviating injustice. Our multidisciplinary approach was tailored to confront the issues at hand through a multifaceted lens, which we believe will help to reveal how stakeholders are affected by and respond to (in)justice, both during and after a marketing or consumption event. Conceptualizing MJP in this way sparks a multitude of questions, which we hope our framework makes tractable for future researchers.

To advance our stated objectives, we employed an "automated textual analysis that can be used to generate marketing insights" (Berger et al., 2020., p. 1). The systematic literature review (SLR) undertaken provided us with a structured and categorized view of what has been produced in the literature on MJP from January 2001 to April 2021. Over 380 empirical studies were identified of which 119 were curated and analyzed using stringent protocols to elucidate the existing research profile and thematic research areas. The four major themes emerging from the SLR were as follows: (1) the need for a theoretical and methodological grounding of the MJP concept, (2) the sociodemographic differences in MJP perceptions and experiences, (3) the antecedents of MJP, and (4) the consumer and marketing consequences of threats to MJP. By no means do we suggest that the list of relevant themes is exhaustive; rather, its purpose was to provide a conceptual jumpstart for researchers seeking to expand the theoretical understanding of the linkages between feelings of (in)justice and responses. We conceptualized marketing-related issues of justice, accordingly, from the perspective of the market stakeholder. Because the justice literature is voluminous and spans multiple disciplines, we elected to limit our focus mainly to findings of particular relevance to marketing. Each issue or theme requires further elaboration, which due to considerations of readability and space constraints, we furnish in an extensive online (Web) supplement.