

The Theoretical Domains of Retailing Research: A Retrospective

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Abstract

In a previous review article [Brown, James R. and Dant, Rajiv P. (2008a), “Scientific Method and Retailing Research: A Retrospective,” *Journal of Retailing*, 84 (April), 1–13], we had discussed the substantive domains, the methodological approaches, and the inferential tools that researchers used to test their conceptual frameworks in 164 articles published in the *Journal of Retailing* during 2002–2007. In this article, we continue this introspective process, by reviewing the theories used in 173 articles published in the *Journal of Retailing* in the 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) time period, and classifying those theories according to their application to various substantive issues. A total of 119 different theories were used across these 173 articles, which we sub-grouped into twelve broad-based theoretical categories: (1) marketing theories, (2) microeconomic theory, (3) consumer choice theory, (4) social exchange theory, (5) information processing theory, (6) satisfaction theory, (7) reference price theory, (8) competitive theory, (9) attribution theory, (10) other psychological theories for individuals, (11) other social psychological/sociological theories, and (12) other theories. We also examine the methodological approaches and tools used to test those theories. A number of research gaps are identified for future retailing scholarship.

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Introduction

Three domains define retailing research: (1) the substantive domain (i.e., problems and issues facing retailers), (2) the conceptual domain (i.e., the theories and conceptual frameworks used to understand retail problems and issues), and (3) the methodological domain (i.e., research design and analytical tools, and their underlying theories, used to investigate substantive and conceptual issues in retailing) (Brown and Dant 2008a; Grewal and Levy 2007b). In a previous review article (Brown and Dant 2008a), we discussed the substantive and methodological approaches that researchers used to test their conceptual frameworks in 164 articles published in the *Journal of Retailing* during 2002–2007. In this article, we continue this introspective review process, inventory the theories used in 173 articles published in the *Journal of Retailing* in the 2004–2009 (to Issue

2) time period, and classify those theories according to their application to various substantive issues investigated. The broad objective of this article, then, is to complete the third leg of this triangle by addressing the conceptual domain of retailing research.

Researchers contribute to the literature on retailing (and marketing in general) in a number of ways. Among them are applying new theories to existing problems, filling knowledge gaps, identifying a theory’s boundary conditions, reconciling contradictory findings, and tackling interesting practitioner problems (Brown and Dant 2008a). As is evident, theory places a key role in making significant contributions to retailing knowledge. A better understanding of theory’s role in retailing research should open new avenues for making substantive, methodological, and theoretical advances in retailing.

While our general objective is to explore the role of theory in developing retailing knowledge, we have five specific aims. The first is to inventory the theories used in articles published in the *Journal of Retailing* during 2004–2009 (to Issue 2). Next, we track the trends in the use of particular theories over the 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) period. Then, we classify those theories according to the substantive issues investigated in

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those articles. Next, we examine the methodological approaches and analytical tools used to test those theories. Finally, we argue that further contributions to retailing research can be made by considering substantive areas in which particular theories have *not* been used. We also argue that using different methodological approaches and different analytical tools to test particular theories might shed additional insights into those theories.

Approach to data coding and analyses

Because many articles are based upon more than one theory, we use the *incidence of theory* as the unit of analysis for our research (see Appendix A for individual study details). For example, some researchers used only a single theory (e.g., Nair, Tikoo, and Liu 2009) and, therefore, such articles were only credited with a single theoretical incident. In contrast, Arnold et al. (2009b) used three basic theories—goal theory, leadership theory, and social exchange theory—to investigate the retail manager’s role in the sales of products and services. We classified this article as having three theoretical incidents. In other words, multiple classifications of individual articles were permitted.

We used a number of rules to determine what theories were used in each article. First, some researchers explicitly noted the theories they were using; we coded those theories verbatim (e.g., Popkowski Leszczyc, Qui, and He 2009). Second, where the theories used were not explicitly noted, we made inferences about them. Certain articles on retail pricing, for example, addressed the inferences consumers make from how goods are priced. Although not explicitly addressed, we inferred from the conceptual discussions that “cue utilization theory” was the implicit theory underlying these studies. Finally, some “theories” may not technically qualify as theories but rather are conceptual frameworks (e.g., retail patronage theory) composed of various constituent theories (e.g., perception theory, attitude theory, etc.). We coded these conceptual frameworks, especially when they are widely accepted, as theories.

Theories and trends in retailing research

In our content analysis of 173 *Journal of Retailing* articles published during the 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) period, we found a total of 377 theoretical incidents, as shown in Table 1 (also see Appendix A). Various marketing theories (e.g., brand equity theory, segmentation theory, service quality theory) account for the largest number of theoretical incidents in the articles reviewed (13.5 percent), closely followed by microeconomic theory (13.0 percent). Consumer choice theory (8.0 percent), social exchange theory (7.4 percent), information processing theory, and satisfaction theory (both with 5.8 percent) round out the top six theories used in recent *JR* articles. The “other” categories accounted for approximately 36 percent of the theoretical incidents that we classified—other psychological theories for individuals (18.3 percent), other social psychological/sociological theories (8.5 percent), and still other theories (9.3 percent).

We identified 119 different theories used in these articles. Because of the unwieldiness of this large number, we classified each of these theories into the twelve broad categories reported in Table 1. In Table 2, we illustrate some of the specific theories belonging to each broad theory category. Note that enough studies relied upon attribution theory that it merited its own category.

Table 3 shows trends in the use of different theories in retailing research during the past 5 years. Marketing theories have declined from their high of 21.9 percent of all theoretical incidents in 2004 to a steady state of about 12 percent in the subsequent years. The *JR*’s Special Issue on Retail Branding and Customer Loyalty appeared in 2004 and explains why marketing theories reached their zenith in that year. The use of microeconomic theory has been increasing over the 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) period. We expect that it will spike in 2010 with the publication of the *JR*’s Special Issue on Modeling the Retail Phenomenon. The incidence of social exchange theory in recent *JR* articles peaked in 2006 (11.1 percent of all theoretical incidents) and dropped to about 2 percent in 2008. It has, however, experienced a resurgence in the first two issues of 2009. Like most of the other theories used in retailing research, the relative incidence of consumer choice theory has bounced around

Table 1
Theoretical incidents in *Journal of Retailing* articles: 2004–2009 (to Issue 2).

Theory	Frequency	Percent
Marketing theories	51	13.5%
Microeconomic theory	49	13.0%
Consumer choice theory	30	8.0%
Social exchange theory	28	7.4%
Information processing theory	22	5.8%
Satisfaction theory	22	5.8%
Reference price theory	19	5.0%
Competitive theory	11	2.9%
Attribution theory	9	2.4%
Other psychological theories for individuals	69	18.3%
Other social psychological/sociological theories	32	8.5%
Other theories	35	9.3%
Total theoretical incidents	377	100.0%

Table 2
Exemplars of theories used in *Journal of Retailing* articles: 2004–2009 (to Issue 2).

Theory	Exemplars	Theory	Exemplars
Marketing theories	Brand equity theory	Information processing theory	Information integration theory
	Customer lifetime value theory		Information search theory
	Retail patronage theory	Reference price theory	Adaptation level theory
	Segmentation theory		Assimilation-contrast theory
	Service quality theory		
Microeconomic theory	Auction theory	Competitive theory	Dynamic capabilities perspective
	Game theory		Resource advantage theory
	Signaling theory	Attribution theory	Resource-based view
	Theory of consumer demand		
	Utility theory		
Consumer choice theory	Cue utilization theory	Other psychological theories for individuals	Attitude theory
	Elaboration likelihood theory		Emotion theory
	Product involvement	Other social psychological/ Sociological theories	Learning theory
	Prospect theory		Memory theory
	Reference-dependent theory		Perceived risk theory
Social exchange theory	Commitment theory	Other theories	Communication theory
	Conflict theory		Diffusion of innovations theory
	Justice theory		Embeddedness theory
	Social capital theory		National culture theory
	Trust theory		Social influence theory
Satisfaction theory	Consumer satisfaction theory	Other theories	Grounded theory
	Job satisfaction theory		Life cycle theories
			Location theory
			Measurement theory
			Role theory

somewhat during 2004–2009 (to Issue 2), peaking in 2007 at 11.6 percent.

One possible explanation for its peak in 2007 is the *JR*'s Special Issue on Service Excellence published that year. Indeed, marketing theories (13.0 percent), satisfaction theory (7.2 percent), information processing theory (7.2 percent), and other psychological theories of individual behavior (23.2 percent) reached (or matched) their highest relative usage during 2007.

Table 3 shows a downward trend in the incidence of reference price theory with an uptick in 2009. We attribute this to the recently published *JR* Special Issue on Enhancing the Retail Customer Experience (2009, Issue 1), which presents a review

of and agenda for various customer-focused issues (Grewal, Levy, and Kumar 2009), several of which incorporated pricing management research (e.g., Kopalle et al. 2009). The incidence of competitive theory has clearly waned, dropping to zero for the first two issues of 2009. In our opinion, the final word on competition in retailing has not yet been written; therefore, the application of competitive theory to retailing problems might be an area for fruitful research.

The use of attribution theory seems to account for roughly 2 percent of all theoretical incidents annually. Similarly, other, non-psychological theories used in retailing research seem to hover around 8 percent of all theoretical incidents for each year.

Table 3
Trends in the use of theories in *Journal of Retailing* articles: 2004–2009 (to Issue 2).

Theory	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Marketing theories	21.9%	8.9%	11.1%	13.0%	11.5%	12.5%	51
Microeconomic theory	5.5%	10.7%	15.9%	5.8%	26.9%	17.2%	49
Social exchange theory	8.2%	10.7%	11.1%	5.8%	1.9%	9.4%	28
Consumer choice theory	5.5%	5.4%	9.5%	11.6%	3.8%	7.8%	30
Satisfaction theory	9.6%	5.4%	6.3%	7.2%	3.8%	1.6%	22
Information processing theory	2.7%	7.1%	6.3%	7.2%	3.8%	7.8%	22
Reference price theory	8.2%	3.6%	6.3%	2.9%	0.0%	7.8%	19
Competitive theory	5.5%	3.6%	4.8%	1.4%	1.9%	0.0%	11
Attribution theory	4.1%	1.8%	0.0%	2.9%	1.9%	3.1%	9
Other psychological theories for individuals	11.0%	23.2%	20.6%	23.2%	21.2%	20.3%	69
Other social psychological/sociological theories	8.2%	5.4%	6.3%	10.1%	17.3%	1.6%	32
Other theories	9.6%	14.3%	1.6%	8.7%	5.8%	10.9%	35
Total	73	56	63	69	52	64	377

Thus, *JR* researchers seem to have employed these two sets of theories with some consistency during most years.

Finally, other psychological theories of individual behavior have remained steady since 2005, accounting for roughly 20 percent of the research incidents uncovered during the 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) period. Other social psychological and sociological theories of behavior peaked at 17.3 percent in 2008, a year when no special issues were published in the *JR*. However, with the publication of the *JR*'s Special Issue on Consumer Behavior and Retailing later this year (2009, Issue 3), we expect the relative incidence of these theories to rebound.

Theories and substantive areas of research in retailing

In this section, we examine how *JR* researchers have used various theories to study the different substantive areas of retailing. Our analysis is twofold. First, we investigate the relative use of each theory across the substantive areas. Second, we then delve into the different theories that researchers use to examine each substantive area.

Within theory/across area analysis

The relative incidence of marketing theories is highest (27.1 percent) in the loyalty area (Table 4). This is partially tautological as the marketing theories of brand equity and customer lifetime value nearly always pertain to brand and store loyalty. Consumer behavior (20.8 percent) and, as might be expected, brand/product research (16.7 percent) also account for the heavy incidence of marketing theories. Researchers utilize microeconomic theory most frequently in pricing (30.6 percent), brand/product (18.4 percent), and promotion (16.3 percent) research. Together these three areas account for nearly two-thirds of the incidence of microeconomic theory during the 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) period.

Pricing (especially research on cue utilization) accounts for 30.0 percent of the incidence of consumer choice theory in our study. Brand/product research accounts for another 23.3 percent, while studies of consumer behavior and services frequently use this theory (10.0 percent each). Channels (28.6 percent) and services (17.9 percent) account for almost one-half of the incidence of social exchange theory. Concepts such as relationship marketing, commitment, and justice characterize research in both of these areas (e.g., Ramaseshan, Yip, and Pae 2006; Yim, Chan, and Hung 2007). They are also important in loyalty research (14.3 percent) and research on organizational issues within retailing (14.3 percent).

Information processing theory is used most frequently in pricing research (27.3 percent), followed by consumer behavior research (22.7 percent). Services marketing research accounts for 18.2 percent of the information processing theory incidents, with internet research (13.6 percent) next. As might be expected, nearly 60 percent of the incidents of reference price theory occurred in pricing research between the 2004 and 2009 (to Issue 2) period. This theory was also used in internet (15.8 percent) and consumer behavior (10.5 percent) research. Exactly half of all incidents of satisfaction theory occur in services research.

Table 4
Use of theories to investigate substantive content in *Journal of Retailing* articles 2004–2009 (to Issue 2): within Theory Analysis^a.

Substantive area ↓	Marketing theories	Microeconomic theory	Consumer choice theory	Social exchange theory	Information processing theory	Satisfaction theory	Reference price theory	Competitive theory	Attribution theory	Other psychological theories for individuals	Other social psychological/sociological theories	Other theories
Brand/product	16.7%	18.4%	23.3%	3.6%	4.5%	0.0%	5.3%	18.2%	0.0%	20.3%	3.3%	6.3%
Channels	0.0%	6.1%	3.3%	28.6%	0.0%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.7%	13.3%	9.4%
Consumer Behavior	20.8%	2.0%	10.0%	3.6%	22.7%	13.6%	10.5%	9.1%	22.2%	31.1%	26.7%	9.4%
Internet	6.3%	2.0%	3.3%	3.6%	13.6%	0.0%	15.8%	0.0%	11.1%	1.4%	10.0%	0.0%
Loyalty	27.1%	8.2%	6.7%	14.3%	4.5%	18.2%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%	5.4%	3.3%	3.1%
Organization	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	0.0%	9.1%	0.0%	18.2%	0.0%	5.4%	0.0%	21.9%
Pricing	0.0%	30.6%	30.0%	3.6%	27.3%	0.0%	57.9%	0.0%	22.2%	8.1%	3.3%	3.1%
Promotion	0.0%	16.3%	3.3%	3.6%	9.1%	0.0%	5.3%	0.0%	11.1%	2.7%	10.0%	9.4%
Services	10.4%	2.0%	10.0%	17.9%	18.2%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	21.6%	26.7%	18.8%
Supply Chain Management	0.0%	8.2%	3.3%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	6.3%
Other	16.7%	6.1%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	27.3%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	12.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

^a The substantive area classifications are taken from Brown and Dant (2008a). The percentages are calculated on a base of 377 theoretical incidents. Shaded areas indicate relative frequencies of less than 10 percent.

Loyalty and consumer behavior research also account for substantial proportions of research employing satisfaction theory (18.2 percent and 13.6 percent, respectively).

Aside from the other content category (27.3 percent), researchers applied competitive theory equally to the topics of brand/product, retail organization, and pricing (18.2 percent). One-third of the time, researchers applying attribution theory to retailing topics applied it to services research, especially to the issue of service failure (e.g., Hess, Ganesan, and Klein 2007). Of the attribution theory incidents, 22.2 percent occurred in both consumer behavior research and in pricing research; promotion and internet research accounted for another 11.1 percent each.

Researchers applied other psychological theories of individual behavior to retailing issues most often in the consumer behavior area (31.1 percent), followed by the services (21.6 percent) and brand/product areas (20.3 percent). Services and consumer behavior research each accounted for 26.7 percent of the application of other social psychological/sociological theories. The area comprising the next largest use of these theories is channels research (13.3 percent), followed by loyalty and services research (10.0 percent each). Finally, other theories were most utilized in research on retail organization (21.9 percent), then services (18.8 percent), followed by the “other” content category of retailing research (12.5 percent).

The discussion so far emphasizes which theories have been used in which substantive area. But, Table 4 also shows substantive areas of opportunity for the application of various theories. For example, we recorded no incidents of marketing theories in the areas of channels, pricing, promotion, and supply chain management. We see considerable opportunity to apply customer lifetime value theory and service quality theory, for example, to issues in retail supply chain management. Similarly, microeconomic theory might provide some valuable insights for issues pertaining to retail organization, consumer behavior, and services marketing. Attribution theory may also provide important insights in a variety of substantive areas, including brand/product, channels, loyalty, retail organization, and supply chain management. These are just a few of the insights afforded by the within theory/across substantive area cross-classification of Table 4 (see the shaded areas in Table 4 for other opportunities).

Across theory/within area analysis

We present our next perspective of the use of various theories in retailing research in Table 5. It shows the different theories used in each substantive area of retailing research. More than any other theory, brand/product research utilizes other psychological theories of individual behavior (31.9 percent). It employs microeconomic theory (19.1 percent) next most often, followed by marketing theories (17.0 percent) and consumer choice theory (14.9 percent).

More than one-third of channels research published in the JR during 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) (34.8 percent) relies upon social exchange theory. It uses other social psychological/sociological theories next most heavily (17.4 percent), followed by microeconomic theory and other theories (13.0

Table 5
Use of theories to investigate substantive content in Journal of Retailing articles 2004–2009 (to Issue 2): across Theory Analysis^a.

Substantive area →	Marketing theories	Microeconomic theory	Consumer choice theory	Social exchange theory	Information processing theory	Satisfaction theory	Reference price theory	Competitive theory	Attribution theory	Other psychological theories for individuals	Other social psychological/sociological theories	Other theories
Brand/product	17.0%	19.1%	14.9%	2.1%	2.1%	0.0%	2.1%	4.3%	0.0%	31.9%	2.1%	4.3%
Channels	0.0%	13.0%	4.3%	34.8%	0.0%	8.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.7%	17.4%	13.0%
Consumer Behavior	16.1%	1.6%	4.8%	1.6%	8.1%	4.8%	3.2%	1.6%	3.2%	37.1%	12.9%	4.8%
Internet	17.6%	5.9%	5.9%	5.9%	17.6%	0.0%	17.6%	0.0%	5.9%	5.9%	17.6%	0.0%
Loyalty	37.1%	11.4%	5.7%	11.4%	2.9%	11.4%	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	11.4%	2.9%	2.9%
Organization	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	35.0%
Pricing	0.0%	27.8%	16.7%	1.9%	11.1%	0.0%	20.4%	3.7%	0.0%	11.1%	1.9%	1.9%
Promotion	0.0%	36.4%	4.5%	4.5%	9.1%	0.0%	4.5%	0.0%	4.5%	9.1%	13.6%	13.6%
Services	8.1%	1.6%	4.8%	8.1%	6.5%	17.7%	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	25.8%	12.9%	9.7%
Supply chain Management	0.0%	40.0%	10.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	20.0%
Other	36.4%	13.6%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	13.6%	0.0%	4.5%	0.0%	18.2%

^a The substantive area classifications are taken from Brown and Dant (2008a). The percentages are calculated on a base of 377 theoretical incidents. Shaded areas indicate relative frequencies of less than 10 percent.

percent each). Consumer behavior research used other psychological theories of individual behavior most frequently (37.1 percent), with marketing theories (16.1 percent) and other social psychological/sociological theories employed next most heavily (12.9 percent). Internet research relied equally and most heavily on four different sets of theories: marketing theories, information processing theory, reference price theory, and other social psychological/sociological theories (17.6 percent each).

Loyalty research drew most heavily from marketing theories (37.1 percent). It equally utilized microeconomic theory, social exchange theory, satisfaction theory, and other psychological theories of individual behavior (11.4 percent each). Researchers most often used “other” theories to explain retail organization issues (35.0 percent). Social exchange theory and other psychological theories of individual behavior each accounted for 20.0 percent of the incidents of theory in retail organization research. Satisfaction theory and competitive theory were also used to investigate these issues (10.0 percent each).

Researchers most heavily used microeconomic theory in their studies of retail pricing (27.8 percent), followed by reference price theory (20.4 percent), consumer choice theory (16.7 percent), information processing theory and other psychological theories of individual behavior (11.1 percent each). Studies of retail promotion utilized microeconomic theory most heavily (36.4 percent), other social psychological/sociological theories and other theories (13.6 percent each). Services research during the 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) period was most frequently built upon other psychological theories of individual behavior (25.8 percent). Satisfaction theory and other social psychological/sociological theories accounted for 17.7 percent and 12.9 percent, respectively, of the services research theoretical incidents.

Microeconomic theories formed the basis of 40.0 percent of the supply chain management research published in the *JR* during 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) period. Social exchange theory (20.0 percent), other theories (20.0 percent), and consumer choice theory (10.0 percent) followed. Marketing theories served as the foundation for the other category of retailing research 36.4 percent of the time.

We find some valuable insights when we look at the theories *not* used within a substantive area (Table 5) (also see the shaded areas in Table 5). Interestingly, researchers who investigate the internet might be able to make a significant contribution to the retailing literature by utilizing theories not frequently applied internet issues. For example, our review indicates that neither satisfaction theory nor competitive theory was used at all during 2004–2009 (to Issue 2) to investigate internet issues in retailing. Further, microeconomic theory, consumer choice theory, social exchange theory, and attribution theory might provide some additional insights into internet retailing. Similarly, microeconomic theory, reference price theory, and competitive theory have been eschewed by services researchers; however, their application to retail services issues might provide important insights heretofore unavailable. A careful inspection of Table 5 will reveal other opportunities to apply lightly used theories within various substantive areas.

Theories and research methods in retailing

In Brown and Dant (2008a), we inventoried the research methods and analytical tools used in retailing research. We extend that work here by examining how researchers have used these methods and tools to investigate the various theories depicted in Table 1.

Table 6 presents a cross-classification of the various methodological approaches and theories used to investigate retailing issues. Qualitative methods, including review articles and editorials, account for 37.3 percent of the theoretical incidents involving marketing theories. Investigations of marketing theories utilize consumer surveys (23.5 percent) and secondary data (11.8 percent) next, most frequently. Researchers use secondary data most often to study microeconomic theories (34.7 percent of the time), followed by mathematical modeling (24.5 percent), and qualitative methods (20.4 percent).

One-third of the studies of consumer choice theory utilized student surveys. Next most often, researchers used consumer surveys (23.3 percent), qualitative methods (16.7 percent), and experiments (10.0 percent) to investigate consumer choice theories in retailing. Tests of social exchange theory involve industry surveys most frequently (46.4 percent), while student surveys (17.9 percent), consumer surveys (14.3 percent), and qualitative methods (10.7 percent) were next most popular. Investigators tested information processing theory in retailing using consumer surveys (45.5 percent) most frequently, followed by student surveys (13.6 percent) and industry surveys (13.6 percent), respectively. Forty-five percent of the incidents of satisfaction theory were associated with consumer surveys, followed equally by student surveys and industry surveys (13.6 percent).

During 2004–2009 (to Issue 2), *JR* researchers studied reference price theory using student surveys (42.1 percent), consumer surveys (26.3 percent), and qualitative methods (21.1 percent). Competitive theory was examined equally with secondary data and qualitative methods (36.4 percent), followed by industry surveys (18.2 percent). Research in the *JR* investigated attribution theory using student surveys most frequently (33.3 percent). It used consumer surveys and experiments next most often (22.2 percent each), followed by secondary data and qualitative methods (11.1 percent each).

While Table 6 shows the methodological approaches associated with the different theories used in retailing research, it also shows opportunities to use somewhat different methods to test those theories. For example, experimentation and industry surveys each accounts for less than 8 percent of the marketing theory incidents we tallied for 2004–2009 (to Issue 2). Clearly, these methodological approaches could offer invaluable insights into marketing theory. Another example is microeconomic theory. Surveys of students, consumers, and businesses as well as experimentation seem to be underutilized in the study of microeconomic theory in retailing.

Table 7 shows the analytical tools used to test our theory categories in *Journal of Retailing* articles during 2004–2009 (to Issue 2). Researchers testing marketing theories used structural equation modeling (SEM) most of all (30.3 percent of all marketing theory incidents). SEM was followed by ANOVA/MANOVA

Table 6
Use of methodological approaches to investigate theories in *Journal of Retailing* articles: 2004–2009 (to Issue 2)^a.

Method	Marketing theories	Microeconomic theory	Consumer choice theory	Social exchange theory	Information processing theory	Satisfaction theory	Reference price theory	Competitive theory	Attribution theory	Other psychological theories for individuals	Other social psychological/sociological theories	Other theories
Student Survey	9.8%	4.1%	33.3%	17.9%	13.6%	36.4%	42.1%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	31.3%	8.6%
Consumer Survey	23.5%	4.1%	23.3%	14.3%	45.5%	13.6%	26.3%	9.1%	22.2%	21.7%	3.1%	14.3%
Secondary Data	11.8%	34.7%	6.7%	3.6%	4.5%	22.7%	0.0%	36.4%	11.1%	7.2%	3.1%	14.3%
Experiment	7.8%	8.2%	10.0%	3.6%	9.1%	13.6%	5.3%	0.0%	22.2%	11.6%	21.9%	0.0%
Industry Survey	5.9%	4.1%	6.7%	46.4%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	18.2%	0.0%	5.8%	18.8%	20.0%
Qualitative	37.3%	20.4%	16.7%	10.7%	4.5%	13.6%	21.1%	36.4%	11.1%	14.5%	18.8%	28.6%
Modeling	0.0%	24.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	5.7%
Other	3.9%	0.0%	3.3%	3.6%	9.1%	0.0%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	3.1%	8.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

^a The method classifications are taken from Brown and Dant (2008a). The percentages are calculated on a base of 377 theoretical incidents. Shaded areas indicate relative frequencies of less than 10 percent.

Table 7
Use of analytical tools to investigate theories in *Journal of Retailing* articles: 2004–2009 (to Issue 2)^a.

Analytical tool	Marketing theories	Microeconomic theory	Consumer choice theory	Social exchange theory	Information processing theory	Satisfaction theory	Reference price theory	Competitive theory	Attribution theory	Other psychological theories for individuals	Other social psychological/socio-logical theories	Other theories
Analytical modeling	9.1%	46.2%	12.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	6.7%	0.0%	14.3%	1.7%	0.0%	14.8%
ANOVA/MANOVA	21.2%	12.8%	40.0%	12.0%	26.3%	19.0%	46.7%	25.0%	14.3%	38.3%	26.9%	0.0%
Qualitative	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	7.4%
Regression	9.1%	25.6%	16.0%	24.0%	31.6%	28.6%	26.7%	37.5%	42.9%	21.7%	19.2%	40.7%
SEM	30.3%	5.1%	24.0%	52.0%	21.1%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	28.6%	16.7%	34.6%	11.1%
Other	21.2%	10.3%	8.0%	12.0%	21.1%	14.3%	20.0%	37.5%	0.0%	21.7%	15.4%	25.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

^a The analytical tool classifications are taken from Brown and Dant (2008a). The percentages are calculated on a base of 377 theoretical incidents. Shaded areas indicate relative frequencies of less than 10 percent.

(21.2 percent) and other analytical tools (21.2 percent). Overwhelmingly, researchers elected analytical modeling to test microeconomic theories in retailing research (46.2 percent). They next chose regression (25.6 percent), ANOVA/MANOVA (12.8 percent), and other analytical tools (10.3 percent).

Investigators of consumer choice theory in retailing research used ANOVA/MANOVA (40.0 percent) most frequently, followed by SEM (24.0 percent), regression (16.0 percent), and analytical modeling (12.0 percent). More than 75 percent of the social exchange theory incidents were studied with SEM (52.0 percent) and regression (24.0 percent). Researchers used ANOVA/MANOVA for 12.0 percent of their social exchange theory tests, as well as other analytical methods (12.0 percent).

Except for analytical modeling and qualitative methods, recent studies of information processing theory in retailing used all of the analytical tools inventoried: regression (31.6 percent), ANOVA/MANOVA (26.3 percent), SEM (21.0 percent), and other analytical methods (21.0 percent). Similarly, research on satisfaction theory in retailing relied strongly upon all of the techniques shown in [Table 7](#), except for qualitative methods (0.0 percent) and analytical modeling (4.8 percent).

Studies of reference price theory in retailing focused on ANOVA/MANOVA (46.7 percent), regression (26.7 percent), and other methods (20.0 percent). Researchers used these same three analytical tools to test competitive theory in retailing (25.0 percent, 37.5 percent, and 37.5 percent, respectively). Tests of attribution theory in retailing were studied with four key analytical techniques: regression (42.9 percent), SEM (28.6 percent), analytical modeling (14.3 percent), and ANOVA/MANOVA (14.3 percent).

Researchers applying other psychological theories of individual behavior to retailing used ANOVA/MANOVA (38.3 percent) most frequently in the articles we reviewed. They also used regression (21.7 percent), other analytical tools (21.7 percent), and SEM (16.7 percent). Studies of other social psychological/sociological theories relied most heavily upon SEM (34.6 percent), ANOVA/MANOVA (26.9 percent), regression (19.2 percent), and other methods (15.4 percent). Retail investigators testing other theories most frequently employed SEM (40.7 percent), other techniques (25.9 percent), analytical modeling (14.8 percent), and SEM (11.1 percent).

[Table 7](#) also shows which tools researchers have *not* applied to studying particular theories (see the shaded areas in [Table 7](#)). For example, retail investigations of satisfaction theory have only infrequently used analytical modeling. The application of mathematical modeling might provide insights into satisfaction theory not possible with the use of traditional methods such as SEM, regression, and ANOVA/MANOVA. Another example is the general lack of use of SEM to study microeconomic theory applications in retailing.

One overall insight provided by [Table 7](#) is that retailing researchers use most of the analytical tools at their disposal. Qualitative methods and analytical modeling are the tools favored least by retailing researchers in investigating the various theories underlying their studies. Applying these two analytical tools might present researchers a fruit-

ful opportunity to make significant contributions to retailing research.

Conclusions

The overall purpose of this article was to explore the theories used to address retailing issues. Our specific objectives entailed: (1) inventorying the theories used in *Journal of Retailing* articles during 2004–2009 (to Issue 2); (2) tracking the trends in the use of those theories over that period; (3) cross-classifying those theories by the substantive issues to which they are applied; (4) examining the methodological approaches and analytical tools used to test those theories in retailing research; and (5) suggesting potential applications of these theories to retailing issues to help make future contributions to the retailing literature.

Our review of recent *JR* publications seems to support the premise that a large variety of theoretical frameworks have been employed by retailing scholars in framing their investigations. We encountered a total of 119 specific theories (collapsed into the twelve broad categories of [Table 1](#)) across the 173 articles covered by the review period. It is important to note that these 173 articles yielded a total of 377 theoretical incidents, suggesting that on an average, about 2.18 theories were utilized per article (this ratio increases to 2.30 per article if one excludes the editorially oriented articles that were not classifiable). Among these twelve theoretical categories ([Table 1](#)), not counting the more general category of other psychological theories for individuals (which led the frequency count with 69), marketing theories and microeconomic theory were utilized most frequently by retailing scholars. [Table 3](#) tracked the usage of these theories across review period. However, the real story behind this review is revealed in [Tables 4–7](#) where we cross-classify these twelve theoretical categories with Substantive Areas ([Tables 4 and 5](#)), Methodological Approaches ([Table 6](#)) and Analytical Tools Employed ([Table 7](#)). These tables also highlight the cells (see the shaded areas) which contain relative frequencies of less than 10 percent. As narrated above, these sparsely occurring frequencies represent potential opportunities for future retailing research.

By the way of a limitation of this review, we acknowledge that in classifying 119 specific theories into twelve broad categories of theories, we were painfully aware of the trade-off between need for organizing the classification into a manageable number of categories and the loss of specificity. In [Table 2](#) we provide a limited set of exemplar theories subsumed within these twelve categories.² On the one hand, such aggregation loses information, thereby limiting the meaningfulness of our results. On the other hand, the disaggregated data would produce frequency counts that would be so minute as to render our results for all but the most popular theories meaningless. Thus, we attempted to strike a balance between loss of meaning due to aggregation and loss of meaning due to minutiae.

² The detailed classification spreadsheet is available from the authors upon request.

Appendix A (Continued)

Authors	Marketing theories	Microeconomic theory	Consumer choice theory	Social exchange theory	Satisfaction theory	Information processing theory	Reference price theory	Competitive theory	Attribution theory	Other psychological theories for individuals	Other social psychological/sociological theories	Other theories
Bruegelmans, Campo, and Gijbrecchts (2006)			X									
Pan and Zinkhan (2006a, 2006b)												
Biswas, Dutta, and Pullig (2006)		X					X			X		
Windsperger and Dant (2006)		X										
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Choi and Coughlan (2006)		X										
Krishnan, Biswas, and Netemeyer (2006)			X				X					
McWilliams and Gerstner (2006)		X										
Jones and Reynolds (2006)	X		X		X					X		
Keh and Lee (2006)					X							
Lueg et al. (2006)											X	
Gopal et al. (2006)		X										
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Moon, Russell, and Duvvuri (2006)			X				X					
Lewis (2006)	X	X										
Cho (2006)			X	X						X		
Baker (2006)	X											
Griffith, Noble, and Chen (2006)								X				
Ramaseshan, Yip, and Pae (2006)				X							X	
Schindler (2006)						X						
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Laroche et al. (2005)						X				X		
Yang and Raghurir (2005)										X		
Dutta and Biswas (2005)	X	X								X		
Taylor and Neslin (2005)			X							X		
Suter and Hardesty (2005)		X					X		X			
Magi and Julander (2005)						X				X		
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Kumar (2005)										X		
Wood et al. (2005)	X	X	X					X				
Horvath, Autry, and Wilcox (2005)												X
Swaminathan and Bawa (2005)												X
Brady et al. (2005)	X				X					X		
Lam and Mukherjee (2005)			X							X		
Levy et al. (2005)												X
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Arnould (2005)								X			X	X
Brown et al. (2005)												X
Sethuraman and Parasuraman (2005)												X
Michael and Kim (2005)												X
Yadav and Varadarajan (2005)	X										X	
Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie (2005)				X	X							
Morales et al. (2005)										X		
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Kumar and Swaminathan (2005)		X										
Sloot, Verhoef, and Franses (2005)												
Darke and Chung (2005)			X							X		
Niedrich, Kiryanova, and Black (2005)					X		X			X		
Gonzalez-Benito, Munoz-Gallego, and Kopally (2005)			X									X
Hsieh, Chiu, and Chiang (2005)				X		X						
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Grewal, Levy, and Lehmann (2004)	X		X									
Wallace, Giese, and Johnson (2004)	X				X							
Gomez, McLaughlin, and Wittink (2004)	X				X							
Sayman and Raju (2004)		X						X				
Noble and Phillips (2004)				X								
Sprott and Shimp (2004)	X		X									
Kumar and Shah (2004)	X									X		
Ailawadi and Keller (2004)	X		X				X	X		X		X
Levy et al. (2004)	X	X					X	X				
Vol. 80 (3)												
Bettencourt (2004)										X		X
Bradford, Stringfellow, and Weitz (2004)				X	X							
Mattila and Patterson (2004)				X	X				X		X	
Zhao and Cao (2004)		X										
Bhatnagar and Ghose (2004)						X				X		
Menon and Dube (2004)					X				X	X		
Evanschitzky et al. (2004)					X							X

Appendix A (Continued)

Authors	Marketing theories	Microeconomic theory	Consumer choice theory	Social exchange theory	Satisfaction theory	Information processing theory	Reference price theory	Competitive theory	Attribution theory	Other psychological theories for individuals	Other social psychological/sociological theories	Other theories
Vol. 80 (2)												
Popkowski Leszczyc, Sinha, and Sahgal (2004)	X											X
Mangleburg, Doney, and Bristol (2004)	X										X	
Srivastava and Lurie (2004)		X										
Estelami and De Maeyer (2004)			X				X			X		
Harris and Goode (2004)	X			X	X							
Senecal and Nantel (2004)						X			X		X	
Vol. 80 (1)												
Raghubir (2004)			X				X					
Vrechopoulos et al. (2004)	X										X	
Gourville and Moon (2004)							X	X				
Finn and Kayande (2004)												X
Chandrashekar (2004)			X				X					
Haytko and Baker (2004)	X											X
Totals	51	49	30	28	22	22	19	11	9	69	32	35

^a Multiple classifications were permitted.

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