Michel Tuan Pham, “The Seven Sins of Consumer Psychology,”
SCP Presidential Address, San Antonio, TX, March 2, 2013.
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Sin #7: Research by Convenience

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Sin #6: “Theories” of Studies vs. Studies of Theories

Theories of Studies

“Previous research has shown that when consumers are hungry, they tend to purchase more at a supermarket than when they are not hungry. However, suppose that they are primed with either the concept of indulgence or the concept of self-control. We predict that hungry consumers primed with indulgence will purchase more than consumers who are not hungry. However, hungry consumers primed with self-control will not purchase more than consumers who are not hungry. This because ...”
“Now suppose that half the participants are asked to remember a 7-digit number and the other half are asked to remember a 2-digit number. Now we predict a 3-way interaction showing that among participants with low cognitive load, the results of the previous study would be replicated; in contrast, among participants with a high cognitive load, hungry participants would purchase more, regardless of whether they are primed with indulgence or self-control.”

**Sin #5 Overgeneralization**
“We all ready know that!”
“That can’t be true because X (2002) showed the opposite”
“Drop Study 3 because you already showed that in Study 2”

**Sin #4: Narrow Scope**
Consumer Behavior

“The set processes by which consumers come to learn about, desire, acquire, use, and dispose of goods, services, and activities available in the marketplace to satisfy their needs.”

Scope of Consumer Behavior

Experience

Desire
- Problem recognition
- Need arousal
- Deprivation
- Wants
- Wishes & Aspirations
- Interests
- Tastes

Acquisition
- Search
- Shopping
- Selection
- Decision making & Choice
- Purchase
- Transportation/Gift
- Rental/Leasing
- Borrowing
- Stealing

Use / Consumption
- Set-up
- Preparation
- Customization
- Consumption
- Enjoyment
- Sharing
- Storage
- Maintenance
- Satisfaction
- Possession
- Collection
- Mental consumption

Disposal / Divestment
- Discarding
- Re-using
- Recycling
- Reselling
- Donating
- Storing away
- Replacement
- Hoarding

Learning
Sin #3: Narrow Lenses

A Concentric View of Consumer Behavior Theory

Mechanical Core
- Attention & Perception
- Sensation & Perception
- Comprehension & Beliefs
- Learning & Memory
- Judgment & Attitudes
- Choice rules
- Satisfaction assessment

Affective Layer
- Affective preferences / Tastes
- Feelings
- Emotions

Motivational Ground
- Needs & Wants
- Goals & Motives
- Self-regulation & Self Control
- Regulatory focus
- Values
- Self identity

Social & Relational Context
- Social influences
- Social identities
- Group membership
- Household structure & Family life cycle
- Religious beliefs
- Lifestyle

Cultural Background
- Cultural norms
- Language
- History
- Economic system
- Political system
- Cross-cultural differences
- Stereotypes
- Ecological terrain

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Phenomena may be multiply determined

Explanation may have different layers:
- Attention > Motivation > Culture

Theories are just conceptual lenses, not statements of truth

Sin #2: Narrow Epistemology
“Theory Driven”  
(Hypothetico-Deductive Path)

1. Hypothesis

2. Test

Data

Phenomenon X

Construct A

Construct B

“Phenomenon Driven”  
(Inductive Path)

1. Observation & Generalization

Phenomenon X

Data

Phenomenon is robust
Relevant to CB

Construct A

Construct B

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Inspired Validation Path

1. Speculation
2. Inspired Hypothesis
3. Validation

Sin #1: Disregard for Content

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General Recommendations

1. More field studies with real consumers and fewer scenario studies
2. Beware of “theories of studies”
   - As Author
   - As Reviewer & Editor
3. Encourage replication & robustness testing
4. Do not overgeneralize published results
5. Expand research focus to non-purchase dimensions of CB
General Recommendations

6. Broader theoretical perspectives beyond IP and BDT

7. Less emphasis on unique and micro-level explanations

8. Embrace broader epistemology
   › Phenomenon-based research (provided robust & grounded in CB)
   › Descriptive research
   › Inspired tests of major industry “theories”

9. Greater attention to content aspects of CB
   › Increase in domain specificity (and decrease in presumed generality).

Incentive Structure

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It's just a speech...