

# Building Theory Using Theories-in-Use Methods: A Journal of Marketing Workshop

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## Abstract

As part of daily life, all individuals—whether they are managers, employees, consumers, or public policy makers—employ mental models (Zaltman, Heffring, and LeMasters 1982). A Theory-in-Use (TIU) is a person’s mental model of how things work in a particular context (Argyris and Schon 1974). Mental models can be elicited to surface interesting, novel theories and concepts that can advance both marketing practice and scholarship (Zeithaml et al. forthcoming 2020).

TIU is a natural approach for creating theories that are specific to marketing-related issues—what have been referred to as “organic” (Kohli 2009) or “home grown” (Rust 2006) theories. These are theories involving central constructs that are uniquely or primarily grounded in the marketing context rather than borrowed from other disciplines such as economics or psychology.

Against this backdrop, this workshop will share insights from our Journal of Marketing article that seeks to inspire and provide guidance on the development of marketing knowledge based on the theories-in-use (TIU) approach. This workshop will provide hands-on guidelines and practical examples for how to make best use of this promising approach. To achieve these goals, we intentionally break away from a traditional paper presentation format. Instead, we will engage participants in a collaborative effort to explore TIU research opportunities and experience first-hand the benefits of relying on TIU methods for developing marketing concepts, frameworks, and theories that impact our discipline. To make the most of the session, the organizers recommend that the participants read Zeithaml et al. (2020) before the workshop so that they are familiar with the key terms and concepts.

In a first part, we briefly introduce participants to the foundations, frameworks, tools and tradecraft of using theories-in-use (TIU) methods for theory development in marketing. To this end, a short opening panel discussion and brief presentations will set the stage and serve as a basis for subsequent practical applications and exercises on TIU methods and tools. The benefits of engaging in TIU-based research are highlighted, including the development of novel organic marketing theories and the opportunity to co-create relevant marketing knowledge with practitioners. Next, we review criteria for selecting research questions that are particularly well-suited for examination with TIU-based approaches and tools. This is followed by practical suggestions for conducting TIU research. We provide hands-on examples of developing new constructs, theoretical propositions (including antecedents, moderators, and consequences), and arguments for justifying theoretical propositions. An overview of TIU tradecraft skills and methods for evaluating rigor in TIU research concludes this first part of the workshop.

In the second part, workshop attendees break-out in small groups to work together with the presenters on a TIU development exercise. Beyond learning first-hand how to apply TIU in marketing, participants further explore particularly promising research avenues that could benefit from TIU research. Break-out groups will reconvene to share insights gained from applying TIU frameworks and tools in marketing.

Finally, the workshop concludes with a Q&A panel session with the presenters to allow participants to ask specific questions regarding the foundations and/or application of TIU research in marketing. This further allow presenters to share additional comments, suggestions and tips for how to make best use of TIU in theory development.

### Recommended Reading for Participants:

Zeithaml V. A., Jaworski, B.J, Kohli, A.K., Tuli, K.R., Ulaga, W. & Zaltman, G. (forthcoming 2020), A Theories-in-Use Approach to Building Marketing Theory, *Journal of Marketing*, 84 (1), forthcoming: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022242919888477>