

# Mechanisms of Legitimation: The Social Foundations for the Adoption of Innovations in Marketing Practice

Yusuf Rahman Al Hakim

Universitas Mayjen Sungkono Mojokerto, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

*This literature study examines the critical role of legitimacy work in securing acceptance for new marketing practices. It argues that innovation in marketing is not merely a technical diffusion but a socio-political achievement requiring deliberate efforts to gain cognitive and social validation. The analysis unfolds at two interconnected levels. At the organizational level, legitimacy work involves tactical efforts such as reframing innovations to align with internal logics, building evidence through pilot projects and success narratives, forming advocacy coalitions, and managing delegitimizing threats. At the field level, legitimacy is constructed discursively for entire categories of practice through conceptual work by experts, dissemination of exemplars via trade media, normative debates, and formal institutionalization by professional associations. This dual-level process creates a legitimacy infrastructure that reduces uncertainty for potential adopters. The study concludes that the effectiveness of legitimacy work significantly determines the fate of marketing innovations, emphasizing that value creation must be coupled with persuasive social justification. Theoretical and practical implications for marketing scholars and practitioners are outlined.*

## INTRODUCTION

The marketing world is in a state of continuous change driven by technological progress, shifting consumer behavior, and increasingly complex competitive dynamics. In such an environment, the innovation of marketing practices is no longer a choice but a necessity for organizations seeking to maintain their sustainability and relevance. These new marketing practices encompass various approaches, ranging from the utilization of artificial intelligence for personalization and revolutionary performance measurement methods to ethical and sustainability-oriented approaches that challenge old paradigms (Khambhata, 2023). Innovation in human resource management is also required to increase organizational competitiveness, including in adapting to changes in marketing practices (Abdulah et al., 2021). This adaptation step is important considering that improving overall institutional efficiency depends heavily on the alignment of its various internal supporting factors (Darmawan, 2024). However, the birth of an innovation does not automatically guarantee its adoption and success in an established business ecosystem. Often, even if a

new practice promises efficiency or competitive advantage, it faces skepticism, resistance, or misunderstanding from various stakeholders, both internal such as management and employees—and external such as consumers, regulators, and business partners (Richards, 2023). In maintaining such excellence, organizations are demanded to formulate service offering strategies that are more adaptive and suitable for dynamic market conditions (Darmawan & Grenier, 2021). The distance between discovery and acceptance becomes a critical space that determines the final fate of that innovation.

Social acceptance of a new practice is a function of the legitimacy attached to it. Legitimacy, from a sociological perspective, refers to the general perception that an action, entity, or practice is desirable, appropriate, or consistent with prevailing systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Dahlquist & Lehnert, 2022). Without legitimacy, an innovation, even if technically superior, may be considered a deviation, a threat, or useless, thus facing barriers to being adopted and institutionalized. Therefore, the ability to build strong social recognition becomes a strategic pillar

\* Corresponding author, email address: [yusufalhakim89@gmail.com](mailto:yusufalhakim89@gmail.com)

for the survival and growth of new entities in the market (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). The process of building, maintaining, or restoring this legitimacy is known as *legitimacy work*. This concept shifts the focus from the mere attributes of innovation to the strategic and rhetorical efforts undertaken by actors to convince audiences of the value and feasibility of that innovation (Dwivedi & Pawsey, 2023). *Legitimacy work* involves a series of communicative and symbolic actions designed to create a persuasive narrative.

In the marketing realm, *legitimacy work* becomes highly important because this field is intrinsically linked to perceptions, meanings, and relationships with the public (Schwoon, 2019). Marketing innovations often disrupt the existing order, whether in terms of internal procedures, budget allocation, evaluation metrics, or the social contract with customers. For example, the transition from mass marketing to data-driven one-to-one marketing not only requires new technology but also justification for the collection of personal data and radical changes in brand communication philosophy. *Legitimacy work* is required to reconcile new practices with dominant institutional logics, whether those logics are oriented toward financial performance, social responsibility, or customer satisfaction (Harmon et al., 2023). This process demands a careful understanding of the target audience's values and the ability to reframe innovations to align with those values. At the implementation level, the success of delivering this message is strongly influenced by support from reliable human resources who possess high loyalty to the organization (Darmawan et al., 2020).

The focus of this literature review is to examine specifically how *legitimacy work* is applied and conceptualized in relation to marketing practice innovation. This study intends to dissect the mechanisms, strategies, and processes through which marketing actors such as marketing managers, consultants, or entrepreneurs conduct *legitimacy work* to gain acceptance for the new practices they introduce. This acceptance is multidimensional, encompassing approval from internal colleagues, funding approval from top management, acceptance by the consumer market, and recognition from the professional marketing community. Each of these dimensions may require different legitimization strategies, ranging from proof through financial figures and alignment with recognized industry trends to the construction of stories that are morally or emotionally engaging. The readiness of business actors in adopting these

new ways is also closely related to the competence they acquire to face competition in the modern market (Zahid et al., 2023).

Understanding *legitimacy work* in marketing innovation becomes an important bridge between innovation management theory and institutional theory. While innovation literature often centers on the diffusion of technology or business models, the institutional approach highlights how social and cultural elements facilitate or hinder that diffusion process. Consumer protection and the legal liability of business actors in the sale of medicine above the highest retail price demonstrate that compliance with regulations builds public trust (Baktiasih & Mardikaningsih, 2024). *Legitimacy work* is the key mechanism connecting these two perspectives. By studying *legitimacy work*, we can uncover why some marketing innovations are widely adopted despite their technical benefits not yet being fully proven, while other innovations that are objectively superior fail to gain a foothold. This study aims to provide a coherent conceptual framework for analyzing the social dynamics of change in marketing practices.

The primary problem that arises in the effort to build legitimacy for marketing practice innovation is the misalignment between the logic underlying the innovation and the deeply rooted institutional logic. Every organization and professional field operates based on a set of institutionalized assumptions, norms, and ways of thinking. Radical marketing innovations, such as the application of predictive algorithms for creative decision-making or campaigns that deliberately avoid direct product promotion, can be considered contrary to the logic of traditional instrumental rationality, which emphasizes control and short-term measurable results. This incompatibility creates both passive and active resistance. Resistance is not merely a rejection of something new, but a defense of established systems of meaning and resource distribution. Therefore, *legitimacy work* must overcome more than just ignorance; it must engage in the negotiation of meaning, efforts to change or expand the prevailing logic, or create niches of legitimacy where the new practice can be temporarily accepted. Dynamics of social compliance or resistance like this are also commonly found in how society perceives compliance with laws applicable in the informal sector (Purwanto et al., 2024).

Another problem lies in the complexity and diversity of the audiences that must be convinced. A marketing innovation needs to obtain legitimacy from various stakeholders who have different interests, values, and evaluation criteria. The sales

team might only care about whether the innovation will boost sales figures; the legal division might be concerned about regulatory risks; top executives focus on the impact on corporate image and shareholder value; while consumers evaluate based on relevance, utility, and ethics. The implementation of Sharia values in recruitment, training, and human resource development shows that organizational values need to be aligned with the expectations of various stakeholders (Darmawan, 2021). In the context of partnerships, this alignment of expectations should ideally be based on the moral commitment of the parties while conducting business cooperation (Irfansyah et al., 2024). This step is crucial to ensure legal certainty and a sense of justice for small business owners so that partnership operations remain balanced (Wibowo et al., 2024). A legitimacy strategy that is effective for one group might be ineffective or even counterproductive for another. For example, justifying an innovation based on extreme cost efficiency might convince a CFO but alarm consumers who might perceive it as a reduction in quality. The inability to design and execute a differentiated and coordinated legitimacy strategy for various audiences can cause an innovation to be partially accepted but fail to obtain the comprehensive support required for successful, sustainable implementation.

The reason why this topic is important to examine at this time is that the pace of innovation in marketing has far outstripped the speed at which social norms and regulatory frameworks can adapt. The explosion of digital technology, social media, and data analytics has birthed entirely new marketing practices, such as influencer marketing, predictive marketing, or the use of augmented reality. These practices often exist in ethical and legal grey areas, triggering questions about privacy, manipulation, and transparency. In such a situation, legitimacy work is no longer optional or merely an internal tactic, but a critical function for the sustainability of the entire marketing industry. Complexity in this cyber era is increasingly challenging due to shifts in the socio-political values of society, which affect how public communication occurs in digital spaces (Fariz, 2021). Therefore, a strong domestic regulatory role is urgently needed to evaluate the effectiveness of law enforcement regarding fair business competition in the digital era (Zulkarnain et al., 2024). An organization's ability to persuasively articulate the value and responsibility of their new practices will determine the extent to which society grants a social license for marketing to continue operating and innovating. Without effective

legitimacy work, public and regulatory reactions can limit the scope of innovation in destructive ways.

Furthermore, this review provides the intellectual foundation required for practitioners and academics to move beyond technical discussions about how a marketing innovation works, toward more substantive discussions about why that innovation is acceptable and by whom. This understanding is vital in a business environment increasingly influenced by non-economic factors such as brand trust, corporate social purpose, and ethical governance. This in-depth study also helps map various rights enforcement constraints often faced by business actors when encountering violations in the real market (Hardyansah et al., 2021). A marketing innovation is no longer assessed solely based on conversion metrics, but also based on its contribution to the wider ecosystem. By mapping the theories and strategies of legitimacy work, this study offers analytical tools to design and communicate innovations in a way that is not only technologically intelligent but also socially persuasive. This can ultimately increase the adoption rate of innovations and reduce the waste of resources on ideas that are socially unviable, regardless of their technical appeal.

This literature review aims to synthesize and analyze the concept of legitimacy work in relation to marketing practice innovation. Specifically, its theoretical goal is to develop a conceptual framework that integrates legitimacy theory from organizational studies with insights from the marketing innovation literature. This framework will explain the mechanisms through which actors build, champion, and sometimes obtain legitimacy for new practices. The practical contribution of this study is to provide conceptually informed guidelines for marketing managers and innovators. These guidelines will assist them in designing more effective communication and persuasion strategies to secure internal support, manage external perceptions, and overcome institutional resistance to the innovations they propose. Thus, this study seeks to bridge the gap between the technical value creation of an innovation and the achievement of the social acceptance necessary for the realization of that value.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is a qualitative literature study designed to synthesize and critically examine the body of knowledge concerning *legitimacy work* in marketing practice innovation. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is highly suitable

for exploring complex, nuanced social concepts that are formed through interpretation, such as legitimacy (Creswell, 2007). This type of literature study does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather to build a comprehensive understanding, identify core themes, relationships between concepts, and gaps in existing literature. The primary method used is a systematic narrative literature review, which allows the researcher to trace the development of ideas, compare perspectives from various scientific disciplines, and construct coherent synthetic arguments based on textual evidence from selected sources. This process emphasizes deep analysis of the meanings, assumptions, and implications embedded in previous academic works, thereby enabling the production of original theoretical contributions.

The study's procedural execution follows the principles outlined by Templier and Paré (2015) for literature reviews in the social sciences. The first stage involves planning the protocol, in which the scope of the topic is explicitly defined, namely the relationship between the concepts of "legitimacy work" and "marketing practice innovation." Primary search keywords include variations of "legitimacy work," "institutional work," "legitimation," "marketing innovation," "new marketing practices," "adoption of marketing ideas," and "institutional change in marketing." Academic databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, and Business Source Complete were utilized to identify relevant journal articles, books, and book chapters, with the publication range focused on ensuring substantial coverage of the discussion. The collected articles were then filtered based on the relevance of their titles and abstracts, as well as publication quality, with priority given to highly reputable journals in the fields of management, marketing, and organizational sociology. The analysis stage was conducted thematically, where the author iteratively coded findings from the literature to identify patterns of legitimation strategies, actors involved, target audiences, and reported outcomes. This analysis is not quantitative or meta-analytical, but rather focuses on qualitative interpretation to construct a deep and structured academic narrative regarding the phenomenon under study.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Strategies and Tactics for Building Legitimacy within Organisations to Foster Marketing Innovation

This study positions internal legitimacy as the conceptual foundation for understanding the

dynamics of marketing innovation adoption within an organizational environment. The process of gaining acceptance for a new marketing practice within organizational boundaries is a strategic and often political persuasive endeavor. This internal legitimacy work is primarily directed at audiences such as top management, boards of directors, department heads, and the marketing team itself. The first fundamental strategy is the *reframing* of the innovation to align with the organization's established values and strategic priorities. An experimental marketing practice, such as community-based marketing that is difficult to measure directly, can be reframed not merely as a communication activity, but as an investment in the company's social capital and the long-term strengthening of the brand ecosystem. Furthermore, the utilization of digitalization as a support for marketing innovation allows for new communication methods, branding strategies, offer designs, and transaction arrangements (Purchase & Volery, 2020). This framing connects the unknown to established logic, transforming a risk into a strategic opportunity. A tactic often accompanying this strategy is the use of language and metaphors drawn from recognized business domains, such as finance or operations, thereby providing a sense of familiarity and rationality to an unfamiliar practice. Such argumentation affirms the importance of symbolic work in building structural acceptance of new practices.

The following discussion demonstrates the evidential dimension as the primary instrument for strengthening claims of innovation legitimacy. Beyond reframing, innovation actors frequently employ proof strategies through pilot projects and success narratives. Before requesting full adoption and large-scale resource allocation, they build small-scale pilot projects designed to generate "quick wins." The positive results of these projects, even if limited, are then used as irrefutable empirical evidence to support claims regarding the innovation's effectiveness. Data from these pilots are transformed into success stories narratives describing how the innovation overcame specific problems, generated cost savings, or increased customer engagement. These narratives are far more persuasive than raw data reports because they provide causal context and emotional meaning. These success stories are then disseminated internally through presentations, performance reports, and informal conversations, serving as powerful legitimation tools to expand support and eliminate doubt. This entire mechanism

demonstrates the transformation of data into organizational symbolic capital.

The next focus is on the relational dimension of the innovation institutionalisation process. The third crucial strategy is to build coalitions and garner support from influential individuals or departments. Marketing innovations rarely gain legitimacy through the actions of a single innovator. The work of legitimisation involves identifying and recruiting internal opinion leaders that is, individuals who are respected, have extensive networks, or hold key positions. Convincing the head of finance or operations to become an early supporter can provide significant credibility, as their support signals that the innovation has undergone rigorous scrutiny from various perspectives. This process is a delicate exercise in interpersonal relations, involving consultation, adapting proposals to accommodate the interests of others, and reciprocal negotiation. A strong coalition creates momentum and reduces the perception that the innovation is merely the agenda of a single department or a narrow interest group. These dynamics reflect the importance of distributing legitimacy through internal power networks. This relational approach is also crucial when organisations seek to minimise potential clashes of values or cultural resistance that often arise when new ideas are introduced into a particular community (Mardikaningsih et al., 2021).

The subsequent analysis emphasizes the necessity of a defensive strategy in maintaining the sustainability of innovation acceptance. On the other hand, *legitimacy work* must also proactively anticipate and address potential sources of delegitimization, which often arise from uncertainty or perceived threats to the existing order (Suddaby et al., 2017). These sources of delegitimization may take the form of public failures of similar innovations in other organizations, doubts expressed by external experts, or resistance from groups that feel threatened by change. To overcome this, organizations can employ tactics such as open acknowledgment of risks and limitations, accompanied by clear mitigation plans, thereby demonstrating preparedness and mature thinking that can build credibility (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Another alternative is to decouple the proposed innovation from previous failure examples by explicitly explaining the differences in conditions, methodology, or implementation through strategic comparative narratives (Harmon, 2019). The type of innovation being shaped determines how they prioritize one form of legitimacy over another to resolve tensions that arise in efforts to obtain

legitimacy with heterogeneous stakeholders (Bundushi et al., 2023). Delegitimization can also be countered by increasing the visibility and transparency of the innovation process itself, such as inviting input and participation from skeptical parties. This strategy aims to shift their position from opponents to co-owners of the idea, an effective approach for building legitimacy through inclusion and a sense of ownership (Gurses & Ozcan, 2015). Thus, *legitimacy work* is not only about building a positive narrative but also involves the active management of doubt and resistance to maintain social acceptance of an innovation. This approach affirms that legitimacy is vulnerable and demands continuous maintenance.

The procedural nature of this internal legitimization process needs to be emphasised. This work of internal legitimization is iterative and dynamic, rather than merely a one-way presentation. The process constitutes an ongoing negotiation of meaning. Feedback from the internal audience is used to continually refine how the innovation is framed, the type of evidence gathered, and the composition of the coalition of supporters. An innovation may initially be framed as a tool for revenue growth, but following discussions with the production team, who have raised concerns about capacity, that framing may shift towards improving customer satisfaction and retention. This flexibility that is, the ability to adapt the narrative of legitimacy without compromising the core of the innovation includes aligning with the relevance of the modern communication channels used by the organisation (Sinambela & Darmawan, 2021). Such flexibility is a hallmark of skilful legitimization work. Ultimate success is marked not only by budget approval, but by the internalisation of the innovation into the language, planning processes, and collective identity of the marketing department or the organisation as a whole. These conditions represent the stages of institutionalising innovation within the organisation's framework of meaning.

Thus, a conceptual synthesis regarding the legitimacy of marketing innovation in an organizational context is formulated. Overall, *legitimacy work* within an organization for marketing innovation is a combination of strategic rhetoric, evidence building, coalition politics, and impression management. It transforms an innovation from a mere tool or technique into a trustworthy and culturally aligned value proposition. Business model innovation has a positive impact on the performance of social enterprises and organizational legitimacy, acting as a partial mediator between the two (Wang

& Zhou, 2021). This process requires a deep understanding of the organizational political climate, the hierarchy of credibility, and the prevailing decision-making logic. Without this *legitimacy work*, even the most brilliant marketing innovation risks remaining invisible, misunderstood, or actively resisted, trapped in what can be termed "technical validity" without the "social authority" to be implemented. This formulation reinforces the position of legitimacy as a prerequisite for effective innovation implementation.

### **The Construction of Legitimacy at the Field Level for a New Category of Marketing Practice**

The legitimacy of marketing innovation is studied as an institutional phenomenon that transcends individual organizational boundaries. Acceptance of marketing innovation is not only fought for within an organization but is also constructed at a broader level, namely the field-level. The marketing field here refers to an inter-organizational community consisting of practitioners, consultants, academics, trade media, professional associations, and regulators who collectively shape the understanding of what "good" and "worthy" marketing is. The implementation of Sharia values in recruitment, training, and human resource development shows that the values embraced by an organization need to be aligned with the expectations of various stakeholders (Darmawan, 2021a). Such alignment becomes a crucial foundation when industries strive to integrate management flexibility to face rapid market changes (Darmawan, 2021b). When a new category of practice emerges such as influencer marketing, growth hacking, or sustainable marketing its legitimacy as a valid and coherent category must be built through interaction and discourse among various actors across this entire field. This process is collective and often dispersed, where legitimacy is accumulated through a series of claims, debates, standardization, and institutional recognition. This description demonstrates that field-level legitimacy is a systemic social construction.

The role of conceptual work is highlighted through the formation of identity for new practice categories. One of the central mechanisms in the construction of field-level legitimacy is through conceptual work and categorization by experts and thought leaders. Academics, renowned consultants, and industry leaders play a role in naming, defining, and mapping the boundaries of a new practice. Through journal articles, white papers, conference speeches, and influential social media posts, they articulate the core philosophy, foundational principles, and value promises of the category. This

conceptual work transforms a series of separate and experimental activities into a recognizable "ism" or "methodology," as occurred with "experiential marketing" or "relationship marketing." The process of naming and defining provides a shared identity, which is a prerequisite for further discussion about the feasibility and value of the category for the field as a whole. Through the strengthening of this theoretical competence, industry players are also assisted in improving integrated teamwork patterns within their work environments (Fared & Darmawan, 2021). This categorization process demonstrates the transformation of practices into structured conceptual entities.

Reflection on the importance of symbolic proof is evident through the representation of exemplary success. A parallel mechanism in the legitimation process is the formation and dissemination of *exemplar* success stories. *Exemplars* focus on an organization's consideration of their position, and whether and how they can adapt or move closer to the model demonstrated (Fisher, 2020). These stories often center on pioneering organizations considered to have successfully implemented the new practice with spectacular results, thus becoming models that attract attention (Greenwood et al., 2002). Trade media, case studies from consulting firms, and stories from conferences play critical roles in immortalizing and disseminating these success narratives, which act as primary vehicles for institutional diffusion (Strang & Meyer, 2008). *Exemplars* serve as concrete and replicable evidence demonstrating that the new category is not just theory, but capable of producing permissible results in the real world, thereby providing strong pragmatic validity (Tolbert & Zucker, 2008). They provide action scripts and role models, which significantly reduce uncertainty for potential followers considering the adoption of the innovation. Having these concrete, successful examples is crucial in helping management formulate business continuity strategies amidst uncertain external situations (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2021). The legitimacy of a category grows along with the number and variety of *exemplars*, as this demonstrates the applicability and resilience of the category across various organizational contexts, which ultimately transforms it from something new and foreign into a common and accepted practice. This series of mechanisms establishes the role of success narratives as a reinforcer of collective legitimacy.

The following discussion underscores the significance of normative debates in the

institutionalization process of new categories. Discourse battles and the negotiation of norms also become important arenas for field-level *legitimacy work*. The emergence of a new practice category is rarely without controversy. There will always be debates regarding definitions, best practices, ethical criteria, and long-term impacts. For example, the category of *data-driven marketing* sparked fierce debate over the balance between personalization and privacy. This ethical dilemma demands collective awareness from decision-makers to steadfastly hold onto moral principles to maintain good relationships with the wider public (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). These debates, although appearing as conflict, are actually an integral part of the legitimation process. Through the exchange of arguments in publications, panel discussions, and online forums, actors in the field collectively establish the parameters of acceptance. This process filters out extreme ideas, crystallizes consensus on core practices, and ultimately produces a set of unwritten norms that differentiate between the "legitimate" application of a category and the deviant ones. This dynamic demonstrates that legitimacy is formed through a process of normative dialectics.

The formal-institutional dimension is emphasized in the recognition of new practice categories. Furthermore, the role of professional associations, certification bodies, and industry awards is paramount in providing formal legitimacy. When a renowned marketing association develops a certification program for specific skills related to a new category, or when a prestigious award adds a specific category for that new practice, it constitutes a powerful act of institutionalization. This pattern of competence standardization is increasingly relevant alongside the optimization of modern data management to support long-term strategic efficiency (Ali & Darmawan, 2023). These formal actions provide a stamp of approval, signaling that the knowledge and competence related to the category have been recognized and standardized by authorities in the field. This creates incentives for individuals to invest their time and resources in obtaining personal legitimacy through certification, which further reinforces the legitimacy of the category as a valid and valued career path. This mechanism marks the transition from discursive recognition to structural recognition.

The following exposition positions historical narratives as rhetorical instruments in the institutionalization of innovation categories. Finally, the construction of field-level legitimacy involves framing the new category within a narrative of

progress and historical inevitability. Throughout history, evolving marketing has experienced cycles of evolution and de-evolution. Markets themselves are not excluded from this construct of legitimacy (Kaal, 2020). Proponents often frame the category as a logical and inevitable evolution of marketing practice, a necessary response to larger technological or social changes. Narratives such as "the future of marketing is..." or "adapt or die" create a sense of urgency and direct attention to the new category while discrediting old approaches as outdated. This frame of inevitability serves to neutralize resistance by making adoption appear as a natural consequence of the logic of progress in the field, thus turning strategic choices into an obligation to remain relevant. Such historical frameworks reinforce the perception that innovation is a part of development.

This summary encapsulates the collective structure that sustains the acceptance of new practice categories at the field level. This process of field-level legitimacy construction results in what can be termed an "infrastructure of legitimacy" for a new marketing practice category. This infrastructure consists of defined concepts, observable *exemplars*, negotiated norms, institutional recognition, and compelling narratives of progress. This infrastructure reduces cognitive and social uncertainty for individual organizations. The influence of Big Five personality traits on job performance shows that individual characteristics also influence how someone accepts and adopts innovation (Darmawan, 2017). When a company considers adopting a new practice, they are no longer assessing a completely foreign idea; they are referring to a category that has already achieved a level of collective legitimacy at the field level. Thus, field-level *legitimacy work* creates an environment that enables and encourages adoption at the organizational level, providing a shared language, tested justifications, and a sense of safety in numbers. This conclusion affirms that collective legitimacy functions as a prerequisite for sustainable adoption. The optimization of healthy competition principles and the role of the KPPU for a fair economy in the digital era show that legitimacy from external authorities is essential for the sustainability of new business practices (Wibowo et al., 2023).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review conducted, it can be concluded that *legitimacy work* is an essential and unavoidable social and rhetorical process in the journey of a marketing practice innovation from conception to widespread acceptance. This study reveals two levels of analysis that are interrelated yet

distinct in their mechanisms and focus audiences. At the organizational level, *legitimacy work* is more tactical and direct, manifested through reframing strategies aligned with internal logic, evidence building through success narratives and pilots, the construction of support coalitions, and the active management of delegitimization attempts. Success at this level depends heavily on the innovation actor's sensitivity to organizational politics, the hierarchy of credibility, and the ability to negotiate meaning iteratively. Internal legitimacy serves to secure the resources, approval, and commitment necessary to initiate implementation.

At the field level, *legitimacy work* is more discursive and collective, aiming to build legitimacy for a new marketing practice category in the eyes of the entire community of external stakeholders. This process is achieved through mechanisms such as conceptual work and categorization by experts, the dissemination of successful *exemplars* through industry media, the battle of discourse to negotiate norms and boundaries, and formal institutionalization through certifications and awards from professional associations. The construction of field-level legitimacy creates an "infrastructure of legitimacy" that reduces uncertainty for individual potential adopters and frames the innovation as a logical and necessary advancement in the evolution of the marketing discipline. These two levels influence one another; legitimacy at the field level strengthens the claims of innovators within organizations, while successful adoption by many organizations enriches *exemplars* and reinforces the category's legitimacy at the field level.

The primary theoretical implication of this synthesis is the reinforcement of a perspective that views innovation, especially in social domains like marketing, not merely as the passive diffusion of technology or ideas, but as a social achievement actively fought for through *legitimacy work*. This study bridges institutional theory from organizational sociology with marketing innovation literature, offering a richer framework for understanding variations in the speed and patterns of innovation adoption. This framework highlights that the objective value of an innovation is often insufficient; its ability to be framed, narrated, and connected to existing value systems becomes a critical determinant. For future research, this study suggests the need for further exploration of the specific interactions between internal and external legitimacy strategies, as well as how the characteristics of innovation actors (such as network

position or credentials) influence the effectiveness of the *legitimacy work* they perform.

From a practical perspective, this study provides a more structured roadmap for marketing managers, entrepreneurs, and consultants introducing new practices. The implication is that designing an innovation must go hand-in-hand with designing its legitimation campaign. Practitioners need to consciously develop dual legitimacy plans: one focused on internal organizational audiences with coalition tactics and phased proof, and another that engages with the wider field through thought leadership, *exemplar* building, and participation in industry discourse. Understanding that resistance is often institutional rather than personal can direct efforts toward the negotiation of meaning and value alignment, rather than mere imposition or superficial persuasion. Furthermore, following the legitimation process at the field level can provide strategic signals regarding when a practice category has reached a "tipping point" of legitimacy, making adoption socially less risky.

Based on the findings and implications of this study, several suggestions are proposed. First, for academics, it is recommended to conduct further empirical research that tests and expands the conceptual framework of *legitimacy work* within specific contexts of marketing innovation, such as artificial intelligence-based marketing, metaverse marketing, or circular marketing approaches. Such research could employ historical methods to trace the legitimation discourse of a category over time or comparative case studies to compare legitimation strategies across different types of organizations. Second, for higher education institutions and professional associations in the marketing field, it is suggested that material regarding institutional theory and *legitimacy work* skills be incorporated into executive development curricula and certification programs. Equipping prospective managers and innovators with the awareness and tools to strategically manage social perceptions of new ideas can enhance the effectiveness of their innovation leadership.

Third, for business organizations, it is suggested that they create structures and cultures that are more conscious of the legitimation process. This may include establishing internal forums explicitly designed to discuss and test the "stories" behind innovation proposals before they are launched, or the appointment of a "legitimacy spokesperson" responsible for building a coherent narrative regarding the company's marketing transformation for various stakeholders. Organizations are also encouraged to foster the active participation of their

marketing staff in external professional communities, not merely as passive attendees, but as contributors to the formation of discourse, thereby influencing the field-level legitimation process that will ultimately benefit their own organization. By adopting a more

strategic and informed approach to *legitimacy work*, organizations can increase the chances for their marketing innovations to move from merely brilliant ideas to accepted and sustainable practices.

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