Spencer M. Ross  
Statement of Research Philosophy

One professor’s comment deeply resonated in my decision to pursue a Ph.D.: “I get to ask questions and then find the answers.” For me, pressing questions exist primarily in two seemingly unrelated areas in which I see potential for eventual research synergy: public policy and interactive marketing. Both areas integrally relate to my personal interests and inform my scholarly activities; I anticipate substantively publishing in high-quality journals in both areas over the next 3-5 years.

My digital/interactive marketing research program is inspired by my early youth as a Star Trek fan, integrating technology into my personal life for nearly two decades in an early-adopter and technology enthusiast capacity. It also led to me receiving the UMass Amherst Isenberg Fellowship in Business, Science, and Technology during my doctoral studies. Although interactive marketing tactics rapidly evolve with technological innovation, academics and practitioners continue to grapple with understanding the higher-level strategic value of consumer engagement.

Multiple projects in this program contribute to research on strategic value creation, using technology as the context of exploration. In one project, my co-author and I use controlled experiments to determine how value is co-created through brands publicly messaging each other on social media. Another co-author and I are looking at how consumers value holographic experiential consumption—ranging from Michael Jackson concerts, to airport virtual security agents. And in a third project, a co-author and I are developing a typology of social media page attacks and testing how consumers’ perceptions of brand value changes after social media pages have been attacked.

My public policy research program relates heavily to consumer-centric sustainability issues. Consumer failures to purchase sustainable products leads to losses for businesses spending millions of dollars researching and developing prosocial products, only for the products to collect dust on a store shelf. In one manuscript from my dissertation, I proposed the Equity Exchange Theory, in which stakeholders tradeoff self- and collective-interest when engaging in exchange behaviors, and validated an individual differences instrument used to segment stakeholders by equity sensitivity. In another manuscript from the dissertation, I tested how self- and collectively-interested consumers responded to prosocial choices in the context of price and quality attributes. These manuscripts are currently being finalized for submission to leading journals and offer potential for future research extensions.

Other projects in this research program include an article I co-authored published in the Journal of Public Policy & Marketing on the effects of mindfulness on college students’ healthy eating behaviors. As some of the first researchers to look at mindfulness in the consumer context, we are continuing with projects on how mindfulness can lead consumers to more self-empowered decision making. A recent mode of mindfulness practice has been using mobile apps; I anticipate being able to leverage these tools to eventually bridge both my public policy and interactive marketing research streams.

Regardless of the research topic, I have clearly adopted the mantra of asking the questions and finding the answers. Although I have been trained in multiple research methods—ranging from structural equation modeling to grounded theory—I find my work predominantly guided by theory in application and am not afraid to use the “method of best fit”. Methodological fit is research question-specific and I vary how I “find the answers”—be they surveys, unstructured interviews, ethnography, or experiments—consistent with how I “ask the questions” (see Edmondson and McManus (2007), Academy of Management Review). As such, I value collaborators who share similar passion for developing, testing, and publishing on theory using the most appropriate methods available.