A Kuhnian Perspective on the Development of Marketing Thought

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Abstract

Marketing scholars have discussed in general the progression through paradigmatic crisis to normal science (cf. Leong 1985), yet little attention has been given to specific anomalies which have shaped the development of marketing thought. The present article utilizes the Kuhnian perspective in order to provide an historical account of three anomalies which have affected the nature, scope, and methods of marketing over the past forty years.

"Man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are and of things that are not that they are not."

Protagoras

INTRODUCTION

Scientific change has been characterized as proceeding through a process which initially involves the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm induced expectations that govern the discipline (Kuhn 1970). These violations of the paradigm induced expectations are referred to as "anomalies". The process continues with extended exploration of the area of the anomaly. The progression closes when the paradigm is shifted so that anomalies become expected components of the resident paradigm.

Marketing academics discussed in general the progression through paradigmatic crisis to normal science (cf. Leong 1985), yet little attention has been given to specific anomalies which have shaped the development of marketing theory. The present article utilizes the Kuhnian perspective in order to provide an historical account of three anomalies which have affected the nature, scope, and methods of marketing over the past forty years.

As an attempt to demonstrate scientific development within marketing, the developments referred to here are not meant to be inclusive of all developments in the discipline, nor are these developments presumed to be mutually exclusive. Rather, the three anomalies are highlighted to illustrate Kuhn's characteristics of scientific discoveries. Each of the anomalies will be shown to have characteristics which include: 1) the previous awareness of the anomaly, 2) the gradual and simultaneous emergence of both observational and conceptual recognition, and 3) the consequent change of paradigm categories often accompanied by resistance (Kuhn 1970). The previous awareness of the anomaly is reflected in articles which recognize the presence of the anomaly in their findings. Conceptual recognition of the anomaly is reflected in essays which partially account for the presence of the anomaly, yet do not incorporate the phenomena into a paradigm. The change of paradigm categories is reflected in treatises which explain the phenomena within a general theory.

While contemporary philosophers of science have found much to criticize in the Kuhnian model (cf. Anderson 1983), these arguments have centered on the assumed domination of a discipline by a single paradigm. This paper asserts no domination of a single paradigm (in any discipline), but uses the Kuhnian model to illuminate the development in marketing thought.

The success of current paradigms is in part dependent on their facility to account for novelties which previous paradigms could not explain. Therefore, after detailing the initial impact of these anomalies their association with current marketing theory is discussed.

THREE ANOMALIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON MARKETING

Anomaly One: "Marketing is a Science."

Prior Awareness. The post World War II discussion of marketing theory began with an experiment to determine the scope of marketing. In 1945 P.D. Converse surveyed marketing academics in an attempt to determine areas of investigation within marketing. Converse specified in the paper title that marketing was developing as a science. While Converse's assertion proclaimed the nature of marketing as a science, other marketing academicians debated the scientific bases of marketing. In the first volume of The Journal of Marketing Coutant (1936) and Cassels (1936) discussed the development of marketing science. Coutant described the analytical potential of marketing research while Cassels discussed the maturation of marketing science out of economics.

Conceptual Recognition. Converse's discussion of the nature of marketing was enhanced by Brown (1948), Alderson and Cox (1948), and Vail (1947). Over the period from 1945 to 1950 these writers suggested that a systemized theory of marketing could be developed. Brown emphasized that the consolidation and application of marketing research methods should be emphasized, while Cox and Alderson offered the behavioral sciences, economics, and ecology as sources for theory development. Vail suggested that if marketing theory is systematized, then marketing may be a science.

Bartels (1951) discussed the evolution of marketing science and defined marketing as "that field of study which investigates the conditions and laws affecting the distribution of commodities and services" (p.227). Bartels recognized that marketing was in the early stages of scientific investigation. In these early stages the results of investigation were frequently descriptive rather than theoretical or analytical. Similarly, Shepherd (1955) and Mclnnes (1956) claimed that while marketing has been examined from many perspectives (e.g., structure, functions, and commodity approaches), contemporary marketing must be viewed from an analytical approach. The analytical approach suggested that marketers ask the question "how well is marketing being done?". Heinnes stated that one must analyze the space, time, ownership, perception, and individual differences of markets to understand marketing.

Resistance to Paradigmatic Change. While many scholars defended the scientific basis of marketing, several writers strongly discounted the notion. Hutchinson (1952) confronted the view of Bartels and suggested that marketing was an art or practice much as engineering or medicine. Stainton (1952) also disputed Bartels by claiming that while marketing is approaching a science, it remains an art.

171
Paradigm Shift. Alderson (1957, 1965) recognized that public discussions of marketing theory were absent prior to 1946, yet the marketing community generally supported his treatises on theory. Alderson described functionalism as "that approach to science which begins by identifying some system of action, and then tries to determine how and why it works as it does" (1957 p.16). Alderson further identified functionalism as a central tendency in the efforts to develop marketing theory. While theories in marketing had been developed in many areas, Alderson considered functionalism to be an eclectic approach.

Alderson (1957, 1965) established the theory of functionalism by asserting that marketing was the force that bridged the gap between makers and users of economic goods. Functionalism was the underlying viewpoint to Alderson's total systems approach to marketing. The functionalist saw marketing as the relationship between an organized behavior system and a heterogenous market. Organized behavior systems ranged from the household to corporations who entered markets to solve economic problems. The markets entered by the behavior systems were considered heterogeneous in terms of their differential demand.

Once the behavior system was defined as operating in heterogeneous markets, the marketing process was viewed as the efforts required in transforming goods from their natural state to meaningful ends. The behavior systems had the functions of searching and sorting for required goods in heterogeneous markets. Marketing bridged the gap between users searching and sorting and makers through the functions of space (distance between maker and user), time (motion of placing goods in front of user at the proper moment), valuation (motions to align offers of buyers and sellers), perception (dissemination of information), and ownership.

Alderson asserted the scientific nature of marketing and defined two units of action to categorize the functions undertaken by a behavioral system. Transactions involved the activities in negotiation which lead to exchange, while transvection referred to composite transformation from raw material to consumption.

Anomaly Two: Marketing is a Pervasive Societal Activity.

Prior Awareness. Just as marketing developed scientifically before it was proclaimed to be a science, marketing academics recognized the societal aspects of marketing before the theory was expounded. Indeed, Alderson (1957) recognized the relationship between an emerging economic system and its environment. Leavitt's essay (1960) addressing the long-term conditions and consequences of the marketing concept was an attempt at focusing on the needs of consumers. In addition Patterson (1966) detailed the responsibilities of marketers to attend to the social and ethical needs of consumers.

Conceptual Recognition. Conceptual recognition of the societal aspects of marketing may be in part attributed to Bartels' theory of marketing based on "social economics" (1968). Bartels defined marketing as the "process whereby society, to supply consumption needs, evolves distributive systems, composed of participants, who, interacting under constraints—technical (economic) and ethical (social)—create the transactions or flows which resolve market separations and result in exchange and consumption" (p.32). Bartels' definition was important from several perspectives: the definition dictated the scope of marketing to be both economic and social. The marketing concept and the relationship between the responsibility of the firm to society became significant components in Bartels' theory. In addition, it specified that marketing was to be viewed as a process which sought the ends of exchange and consumption.

Not only did marketing theoreticians recognize the responsibility of firms to society, but they also discussed the use of marketing technology in other sectors of the economy. Kotler and Levy (1968) and Kotler (1972) emphasized that the scope of marketing was not limited to profit-oriented organizations and their immediate consumers. Kotler and Levy suggested that marketing should be a function performed by not-for-profit organizations, and Kotler emphasized that firms must be concerned with all their publics. Kotler claimed that in addition to the consuming public, organizations must be concerned with their government, support, employee, supplier, competitor, agent, general, and special publics. Additionally, Lavidge (1970) and Day and Aaker (1970) emphasized the necessity of marketing firms to sense a moral responsibility towards the consumer.

Resistance to Paradigm Change. Kotler's assertion that the scope of marketing could be applied to non-profit organizations was disputed by Luck (1969). Luck claimed that marketing, defined as remains concern only with the transactions of profit-motivated businesses. Kotler and Levy (1969) refuted the notion that the nature of marketing was transactions and stated it was myopic to consider marketing anything less than the study of exchanges.

Paradigm Shift. The process of refining the theory in marketing was enhanced by the efforts of Hunt (1971). Hunt suggested that the socio-economic approach lacked the lawlike generalizations necessary for theory and contained only heuristic value for generating additional theory. Hunt's efforts identified flaws in Bartels' theory while providing marketing academics with a framework for theory construction. Hunt's contentions focused on the structural components of sound theory. According to Hunt theory should contain systematically related statements and lawlike generalizations. In addition, theory should yield empirically testable hypotheses.


Hunt's theory included the concepts promoted by Kotler (1972) and the social aspects of marketing. The scope of marketing according to Hunt focused on three dichotomies: positive/normative, profit/non-profit, and micro/macro. The positive/normative dichotomy concerned the presentation of studies within the marketing literature. Positive literature centered on the description, explanation, prediction, and understanding of marketing activities and phenomena while normative literature centered on prescriptive information. The profit/non-profit dichotomy sought to include the orientation of profit and not-for-profit institutions. The macro/micro dichotomy was based on the level of aggregation and orientation of marketing activities. The micro-orientation referred to individual consumers or firms and their internal marketing interests. In contrast, the macro-orientation referred to "the study of (1) marketing systems, (2) the impact of marketing systems on society, and (3) the impact of society on marketing systems" (Hunt 1983 p.12). The combination of the components of the three dichotomies permitted the division of the scope of marketing into the following groups: profit/micro/normative, profit/micro/positive,
profit/macro/normative, profit/macro/positive, non-profit/macro/normative, non-profit/macro/positive, non-profit/micro/normative, and non-profit/micro/positive.

Anomaly three: Marketing Uses Competing Research Methodologies.

Prior Awareness. Scholarly marketing journals have numerous examples of the implementation of competing research methodologies. Warshaw (1980) directed attention to the attitudinal and social antecedents of behavior, and Nord and Peter (1980) emphasized the behavior modification perspective. In addition, Savitt (1980) detailed the importance of an historical perspective in marketing. Savitt described an orientation to research which integrates objective scientific method and subjective perceptual experiences into a method for historical analysis.

Conceptual Recognition. Several research streams have contributed to the development of competing methodologies in marketing. Carman (1980) tabulated the six paradigms which he claimed composed the current knowledge base of marketing. These paradigms included: microeconomics, persuasion/attitude, conflict resolution, general systems, functionalist, and social exchange. Carman's essay was significant since it allowed for several paradigms to dominate the body of knowledge of science.

While Carman elaborated upon the competing paradigms within marketing, he evaluated paradigms based on their potential to lead to useful theories. Reiterating the efforts of Hunt (1971) and Ragozzi (1976), Carman specified that theories were useful if they produced lawlike generalizations and testable hypotheses. Current evaluations of the knowledge produced by academic marketing research no longer require theories to generate testable hypotheses and lawlike generalizations. Lauden's declaration (1984) of the pluralism of method in marketing states that the litmus test for the certifiability of method in marketing lies in the capability of the method to produce certain cognitive and social aims. The viability of a methodology, according to Laudan, is relative to the aims of the research stream in which it resides.

Several other academicians have recently contributed to the research orientation proposed by Laudan. In particular, Anderson (1986) and Hirschman (1979) have discussed the merits of diverse methods in marketing. The critical relativist orientation of Anderson states that while the cognitive ends desired by scientists are essentially the same, each research program has different means by which to obtain those ends. In contrast, Hirschman highlights the idiosyncratic differences in scientific styles between academic researchers. Hirschman claims that despite the diverse styles of researchers, they all have the cognitive aim of making a contribution to their discipline's knowledge base.

Resistance to Change. Resistance to the paradigm shifts proposed by the recognition of diverse methodologies varies with the theoretical orientation of the marketing scholar. "Modern empiricism, as proposed by Hunt (1984), incorporates the requirement that the methodology of marketing involves the empirical testing of theories. Evaluation of theories is based on the empirically testable hypotheses which the theories generate. It is presumed that if two paradigms provide useful theories, then both paradigms are valuable to the science.

While modern empiricism permits multiple methods within science, the modern empiricist utilizes criteria which differ from those of a relativist orientation. Whereas

the relativistic orientation bases the usefulness of research on the sub-discipline's research stream (Anderson 1986), the modern empiricist requires that the knowledge be empirically testable (Hunt 1984). The modern empiricist incorporates an empirical testing process for evaluating knowledge claims, but the relativist evaluates data within the framework of the specific theories on which the research is based.

Paradigm Shift. Any assertion regarding the change of a marketing paradigm to incorporate competing research methodologies must necessarily be tentative. For example, while political economy paradigms (e.g., Stern and Rebe 1980, Arndt 1983) allow for multiple paradigms within marketing, the currently published versions of the paradigm incorporate no methodological orientation. The paradigm is traced to modern empirical criteria established by Ragozzi (1976) and Carman (1980), but the constructors of the paradigm suggest no methodological orientation. In short, while the paradigm permits the implementation of diverse research streams within the framework, it does not specify a methodological orientation.

INTEGRATION OF THE ANOMALIES IN CURRENT PARADIGMS

The discussion in this essay has illustrated the development of marketing through the Kuhnian theory development process. Marketing has progressed through refining current theories to account for the previously unexplained phenomena. Each attempt at providing a framework for the advancement of marketing knowledge knowledge has provided a deeper appreciation of the nature, scope, or methodologies of marketing.

While the Kuhnian development process has been exhibited within the construction of marketing philosophy, reflection upon the state of marketing science suggests that the discipline remains in a methodological dilemma. Critical relativism has been defended as a necessary element in the advancement of the knowledge base of marketing (cf. Anderson 1986), yet the paradigm which incorporates this position is incomplete.

Scholarly journals are advocating the methodologies of several competing research traditions (Lutz 1987), but theoreticians have not constructed a general framework for these traditions in marketing. The discipline reflects an awareness of the competing methodologies and the journals reflect a conceptual and empirical recognition of these methods. However, a general framework for marketing which sufficiently explicates the position of these competing methodologies remains to be developed.

Theoreticians have described general theory as the broadest theory explaining marketing phenomena, yet a general theory cannot be stated at this time since its components theories are still developing (Sol-Amary 1979). The consequences of marketing's recent empirical contributions are phenomena not identified or categorized in previous general frameworks.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion of theory development in marketing has focused on accounting for the anomalies which research has uncovered. As the science has developed the anomalies which are a by-product of normal science have been accounted for in theory development. This accounting process has been referred to elsewhere as a reconciliation (Holbrook 1984). A theory which accounts for the anomalies of the science enables further
advancements in the disciplines body of knowledge. The development of methodologies and component theories contribute to marketing's knowledge base and provide informa- tion for the enhancement of marketing thought.

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