IDEOLOGY VS. SCIENCE IN MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to one of the major threats in the social sciences, in general, and marketing, in particular. This threat is the tendency to impose universality on temporal and contextual facts and relationships found in empirical measurements. The paper discusses the ideological character of this tendency and tries to differentiate a scientific approach to facts from an ideological one. In this vein, the scientific discourse is argued to be one of understanding the historical process vs. the compiling of temporal and context-specific truths. Examples of ideological bias in the social sciences and in marketing are given, and some principles are proposed for a scientific and socially relevant paradigm in marketing.

I. INTRODUCTION

Even after all the economic development and technological wonders in this twentieth century, misery and human suffering seem to march on relentlessly.
Thanks to one of those wonders, the mass communications systems, we are able to hear and learn more about these problems. Despite different rationalizations for these many different kinds of miseries (individual, societal, international, physical, psychological, etc.) by many politicians, administrators, and ideologues, the growing questioning of the causes and greater push for action all around the world is felt. This same movement is felt in the social sciences in the search of a paradigm, an approach that will enable a total (holistic) understanding of the causes and that will, therefore, bring to the social sciences a socially relevant perspective. Thus, we are witnessing continual questioning and criticism of the dominant philosophies of science (Althusser & Balibar, 1970; Birnbaum, 1971; Cohen, Feyerabend, & Wartofsky, 1976; Feyerabend, 1978; Gouldner, 1970; Lakatos & Musgrave, 1968).

In the past, marketing scholars have been greatly interested in adopting "scientific" methodologies in applying themselves to research, and there has also been interest and discussion in the area of defining marketing as well as its boundaries. However, publication within the discipline regarding scientificity of theories and methods of theory development has been scarce, only recently gaining some momentum (Angelmar & Pinson, 1975; Bagozzi, 1976; Bartels, 1974; Hunt, 1971; Zaltman, Pinson, & Angelmar, 1973; Zaltman, LeMasters, & Heffring, 1982). Since marketing is experiencing growth as a discipline, evident in the number of new areas developing within the discipline and in the number of contributions by marketing scholars to literature within and outside of the marketing journals, the necessity for such an evaluation is growing. Also, from the point of view of the pressing social needs mentioned at the beginning, marketing could greatly help our understanding given its concentration areas such as consumption and need satisfaction.

I think that it is important for marketing to make such an evaluation if it is to continue on a path which will be deemed today and in the future as relevant, useful, and scientific. In this paper, I wish to make a critical evaluation which will definitely not be exhaustive but will try to pinpoint one major possible threat to the growth of a socially relevant perspective in marketing, one that I perceive to be a very likely and detrimental threat. This threat I see to be one of a dominant ideological paradigm, which by its premises and assumptions disables marketing studies from breaking some traditional and highly prejudicial limitations. Thus, this paradigm is unscientific, although it uses "scientific methods," as I shall try to show. Further, the point of demarcation between ideology and science, which I will discuss, is not the same as what many social scientists have discussed within the context of values in science and/or value-free science. The demarcation I shall discuss is related to values and norms adhered to by social scientists but can be pointed to independently and separated from these value judgments, in the sense that all scientists, whatever their values, I believe, can grasp this demarcation. In order to make my arguments simple and understandable, I shall begin with a discussion of the meaning (or definition) of ideology.

II. IDEOLOGY

Quite different definitions of the term ideology can be found in the literature (Birnbaum, 1971; Gellner, 1968; Gouldner, 1970; Lutz, 1977; Mannheim, 1936). There are, however, two common underlying elements in these definitions. One is that ideology is the totality of a person's ideas about life and being, thereby including his or her values. Another common element is that there is a link between ideas and the special interests and experiences of those holding these ideas, thereby introducing the aspect of bias into the definition. As such, the dictionary definition of ideology is generally something like: "A system of interdependent ideas (beliefs, traditions, principles, and myths) held by a social group or society, which reflects, rationalizes, and defends its particular social, moral, religious, political, and economic institutional interests and commitments" (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1979). With the writings of Marx and Engels (1947) and later Mannheim (1936), ideology has come to acquire its meaning of being influenced and distorted (biased) by the interests and the sociohistorical setting of individuals and groups (Ludz, 1977).

While such special interests, values, and biases are involved in ideology, it is different from theology or dogmatism in that it does not lack empirical bases and, therefore, is not constituted of "unfounded" or "pure" beliefs. In fact, since, as mentioned in the foregoing definition, ideology is the product of the special interests and experiences of social groups and individuals; hence actual experiences, observed facts, and truths constitute its bases. As such, ideology is an ever-present phenomenon in all societies and is the prevailing element in the value systems, norms, and public policies that dominate society (Dowse & Hughes, 1972; Seliger, 1976). Such a presence influences the approaches to scientific inquiry and its underlying philosophies and premises (Heilbroner, 1973; Ludz, 1977). With the sociopolitical success of an ideology its hold on the dominant paradigm in the (social) sciences becomes stronger until weaknesses occur in this paradigm's ability to explain and solve certain problems perceived to be major in the society. According to Kuhn (1962), it is at such instances that revolutionary changes occur in the paradigms that dominate. But is science always to suffer such revolutionary changes? It rather seems so, as long as such ideological approaches continue.

III. IDEOLOGY VS. SCIENCE

Since a major aspect of scientific inquiry is considered to be verification and falsification through empirical testing of theoretical frameworks (Lakatos & Musgrave, 1968), and since, as I have just said, the foundation of ideologies is in the empirical truths and experiences, what then is the difference between science
and ideology? The difference lies in the way empirical reality is approached. In ideology, the time and/or context-dependent facts (i.e., truths of a certain historical period and/or society) are extended out of their realm and accepted as universal. Examples of this ideological tendency can be seen in the development and existence of all chauvinist (sexist, nationalist, ethnic, etc.) ideologies. Differences between the sexes, nationalities, and ethnic groups which are due to sociohistorical formations are, in these cases, observable as facts. Thus, for example, a scholar observing our society today is very likely to conclude that men are aggressive and women are passive. Simple observation of facts is totally innocent. However, when we take this temporal fact and argue that this is "human nature," that this always was and will be the case, we fall into the ideological trap. This is not different from the Newtonians arguing that ever since human beings have been on Earth time has been absolute and therefore it is universally absolute—a premise rejected by Einsteinian physics. If indeed we were able to extend our direct experiences and immediately observable facts in such a case to the universe, time would not be relative and space would not be warped.

Unfortunately, exactly the same kinds of ideological biases are not so readily realized in the social sciences. Unlike physical phenomena which are mostly external constraints that can be observed standing at some distance, social phenomena are results of our direct participation, and it is much more difficult to accept the fragility of direct experiences. Moreover, when directly experienced, the tendency to extend temporal/contextual truths out of proportion is highly tempting. Thus, we often neglect the effect of social history, which just like all other threats to validity (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) is a threat to scientificity. Just as one example, take the leadership studies of Bird (1940), Mann (1959), and Stodgill (1974). Leadership traits are sought independent of the sociocultural context, leading to conclusions that leaders will always possess certain characteristics. And all this under the assumption that leadership is a required aspect of human society: several studies have shown that when people are brought together totally randomly to perform some task a leader always emerges. The sociohistorical bias here is that no matter how randomly these people were selected they have already learned within a certain social context and have been socialized into certain social patterns. Randomization cannot remove this socialization. Thus, when we accept such observed facts we have ideological biases. The bias is further ideological because the process of empirical measurement of the status quo and consequent acceptance of it as a universal truth—frequently leads to arguments for its preservation.

According to the definition of ideology presented, then, the unscientific, ideological biases come into play in the interpretation of empirical findings when facts are taken for granted without cognition of the social, political, economic, and cultural history underlying these facts. Therefore, the demarcation point between the ideological and the scientific is that science seeks to understand temporal and contextual truths (facts) within their history, while ideology generalizes from temporal and contextual truths. This is the major difference between scientific and ideological approach to knowledge. In this sense, the social scientific discourse is one of understanding history, not one of compiling historical facts.

There are, unfortunately, quite a number of pressures on social scientists toward selecting the ideological approach. The social and psychological pressures to accept the specific characteristics of the specific system the social scientist is living in, the fears of basically unknown alternatives, and therefore the necessity felt to preserve what has enabled one to achieve (and become a social scientist) push him or her to become a compiler of contemporary/contextual facts and believe in them without much skepticism—and this becomes the nature of science within the dominant school. Furthermore, professional pressures to produce and publish in quantity disables the scholar/researcher from becoming involved in long, time-consuming projects. We become overburdened with easily measurable observables and facts. The knowledge enterprise within the dominant school becomes built upon the foundation of such facts only to collapse when history causes these "truths" to be no more. In Kuhn’s (1962) terms, it is at such times that new and revolutionary ways of looking at truths are required and new paradigms take over.

I would like to make one more point before I go onto a discussion of ideology in our dominant marketing paradigms. There are many arguments for the point that values and ideology are not separable from science (e.g., Heilbroner, 1973; Ludz, 1977), that there will always be values interwoven with scientific interpretations. Here, I would like to say that in this sense there is a difference between values and ideology. For example, science is not free of values in that it is not indifferent. Science is on the side of truth. Therefore, by being scientific we cannot be free of values. As scientists, we value truth and are on the side of realities against those who try to hide it or distort it. Furthermore, if as scientists we understand reality and realize that given certain processes, action, and/or conditions, change may occur or may be prevented, we can as people with values select to value change or preservation, even taking action as political beings. All these, different from ideology, do not hurt the scientific discourse in my mind. Ideology does, since, different from the above examples, it prevents the discovery of universal, historical reality, limiting us to temporal/contextual facts.

IV. IDEOLOGY IN MARKETING

An ideological bias is, of course, never acknowledged when practiced. In many cases, since the ideological bent is well integrated with the status quo, it is not recognized by those who practice it. It lingers in the nature of the way things are studied and assumptions are made. It is obvious not only in what is done and said but also in what is not studied and left unsaid. Fortunately, in this
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The acceptance of present structures as constant and universal and results in an ideologically biased body of knowledge, as discussed earlier. Furthermore, the forms of these activities become the focus of study rather than their content. For example, take studies in communication (advertising) effectiveness. We find that use of a credible source of communication increases effectiveness (at least in the short term) (Aronson, Turner & Carlsmith, 1963) or that women identify with traditional women’s roles, liking ads that portray them as such (Wortzel & Fritsbe, 1974). As it is clearer in the case regarding women’s roles, these findings depend greatly on the socially learned reactions of the receivers of the communication. We say, for example, that students learn and understand better when we have some action and entertaining element in our classrooms. When we do not mention or make a point that this is due to the expectations of students conditioned by their everyday environment, especially the mass media where entertainment and show value (i.e., “pace”) is now even required in news programs, we fall into the ideological trap of accepting this observation at its face value, using it to teach better and thereby perpetuating the fact itself. These are examples of a general approach in our definitions which lead to the ideological trap—not by what is done but by what goes unsaid.

The second tendency toward ideological dominance is in the acceptance of exchange as the core concept. The dominance of exchange itself in our economic relations is due to the historical development of the market system. But taking this out of its domain and applying it to all situations as is done with social exchange (Homans, 1961), i.e., searching for an exchange behavior in every human interaction, is an ideological imposition which additionally contains a tautological definition of exchange (Robson, 1968) similar to the use of Freudian “ego” (Marcuse, 1970) and Skinnerian “operant conditioning” (Chomsky, 1973). Several marketing scholars have realized that needs can be satisfied through processes other than exchange (e.g., Enis, 1973); however, they are still willing to limit the discipline to those of exchange. This, of course, is a personal choice for marketing scholars in terms of what aspects of need satisfaction interests and excites them. However, its imposition onto the discipline as boundaries on the subject matter of studies in marketing would be totally ideological as well as arbitrary. For those who are ready to believe that there is exchange in every human interactive behavior, this would not seem so. Looking at the society we live in today, this may even seem a universal character of “human nature.” This is, however, exactly the trap of ideology; given certain life experiences it seems so obvious.

Considering the consumer research area, the influence of the managerial-technological emphasis is clearly seen. Along with emphasis on easy and fast research (Jacoby, 1978), buyer behavior rather than consumer behavior is studied. This is considerably due to the interest in persuasive action in marketing. Given the sociohistorical foundations of society (stereotyping, dominant values, norms, etc.), buyer behavior studies have successfully enabled marketers to manipulate
images of commodities and orchestrate marketing elements to get the best fit between target market characteristics and the attributes on sale. Indeed, however, the sociohistorical structure is given. For example, buyer behavior studies begin with the assumption that there is a need perceived by the consumer unit for a car or a TV set. This need in many cases is acknowledged to be social, but this social construction process is never made a problem of study. Thus, again by omission, our studies become ideological. In studies of behavior related to consumption phenomena, therefore, all of our studies tend to be related to brand choice, not to choice between having and not having a TV set, for example.

In the consumer research area, then, the major problem regarding ideology is related to the researchers' static conceptions of "human nature." One major consequence of this is, as just mentioned, that needs for certain products which are dominant in our life patterns are taken as givens. This may seem a realistic assumption given the presently very high ownership levels of these products. However, the problem with this is, of course, that we miss a complete understanding of consumption phenomena, arbitrarily starting our studies at a point dictated by history, without knowing or understanding that history. Consequently our findings and predictive models remain limited to contextual and temporal structures and processes, to be rendered useless when these change. Furthermore, our ability to extend our frameworks to socially meaningful levels, going beyond predictive validity given the contemporary social context to explain the problems humanity encounters within this context, is also limited.

There are, similarly, other givens which are not universal givens, in our frameworks, which lead to the same ideological trap. Consider, for example, our studies on source credibility in advertising which assume a skewed distribution of information, on attribution which assume that human beings will necessarily want to justify their actions, on reference groups which assume there will always be significant others, etc. Today, these assumptions may seem unshakably universal, but the more we do not want to question them the more ideological we remain.

The methodologies we use are not completely free of the same problems. I have already mentioned the weakness of the methodologies we use in not being able to eliminate sociohistorical biases. Furthermore, our ideal methodology in inferring causal relationships, i.e., the experiment, extended to the idealistic in Campbell's paper "The Experimenting Society" (1973), is again highly dependent on the assumption of power differentials and the experimenter's ability to manipulate and control subjects. Consider a society where total information dissemination and inability to withhold information have become the norm. While at this point it seems far away, the possibility will only be denied by those not able to go beyond their ideological limitations. In such a society, social experimentation would become impossible. Social science cannot take sociohistorical formations as givens. It cannot even take its own methodologies and status as given.

At this point in time it would be utopian to expect all colleagues to grasp this ideological trap, given the social scientists' conditionings and commitments. Thus, my present purpose in this paper is to create questions rather than obtain full acceptance or produce decisive answers. However, I shall briefly try to present what I perceive to be important elements of a scientific and therefore socially relevant perspective in the future of marketing.

V. PROPOSITIONS FOR SCIENCE IN MARKETING

Since ideology is a consequence of naive empiricism and of accepting temporal/contextual facts and truths as universal and as eternal truths, the first requirement for science in marketing is to make sure that such approaches are rejected. Every empirical fact and relationship observed must be questioned historically, and an attempt must be made to position them within the historical process. The general approach ought to be, then, to try and explain why such facts and relationships are found on the basis of trying to understand the history of these facts and relationships. This might seem a tremendously trying task and almost impossible if perceived narrowly. That is, it might be considered unrealistic to ask every researcher to complete the task for every empirical piece of study. This is true, of course, since a historical theory or perspective is not possible to be tested in each study, but this is not necessary for a historical perspective. What is important and necessary, however, is to define the concepts that are tested through measuring facts, with linkages to their social history, not independent of it. To do this, macro-theoretical frameworks are required which advance hypotheses regarding the historical process. As each study is made, linkages must be made between the concepts that enable operational measurements presently and the concepts in theories of the historical process (the macro theories), either already developed or being developed. Thus, not only the concepts and relationships presently operationalized but also the theoretical propositions of the macro theories will be under empirical inquiry. Three important results are obtained by having these linkages: (1) theory, rather than easy to measure empirical facts, guides research; (2) the ideological trap is avoided since the scholar is forced to recognize the limitations of temporal and contextual conceptualizations; and (3) a holistic understanding of social phenomena is sought, rather than piecemeal and often contradictory findings which do not contribute much to our understanding of our own social conditions.

I think that a natural result of the aforementioned linkages will be the necessity of turning away from compartmentalizing social science into disciplines such that each discipline has its own variables to study. Compartmentalizing social phenomena has been done within the dominant social science school on the basis of the argument that this increases the preciseness of our findings, and this argument may be to some extent true. However, what little preciseness has been gained has occurred at the expense of a real understanding. Furthermore, social scientists have lost sight of the totality of social phenomena with each discipline.
bound within its own cubicle. Since understanding the sociohistorical process cannot be achieved on the basis of only economic, or political, or sociological, etc., variables, a real social scientific approach will overcome this limitation. I believe social science is a whole and has to be practiced as such. Disciplines can be present, however, not on the basis of limiting variables with which they work but on the basis of their perspectives—their approach and vision into the same social phenomena. I believe that marketing has an advantage in this respect since it has always been an interdisciplinary field, borrowing from economics, psychology, social psychology, etc. I think it can develop its perspective into a socially relevant one by studying, not from a marketing organization’s but from a social point of view, the formation, transformation, and satisfaction of needs in society. This perspective must not be limited to studying individual micro phenomena but must be extended to understanding the historical role of structures and processes at the societal level.

Finally, two more developments are required as natural results of what has been discussed. First, theories must be freed from givens, and all concepts and/or variables must be made subject to study. If within limited frameworks givens must be used, their temporal and contextual formations within the historical process must be recognized. Second, all limitations found in marketing in terms of its subject matter (exchange), audience (marketing organization), and orientation (managerial-technological emphasis on prediction) must be removed in order to achieve a socially relevant perspective—which in the final definition is an inseparable aspect of scientificity.

VI. CONCLUSION

The distinction between ideology and science is not an easy one in practice but must clearly be made if there is to be any hope for social science. I have in this paper tried to make this distinction, as clearly as I can at this point, on the basis of how observed truths and/or measured facts within a certain historical period and a certain social context are treated. Empirical measurement is clearly not the answer for this distinction, since most ideologies in fact stem from empirical experiences. The distinction between science and ideology, therefore, has to occur in the approach to empirical measurement and in its interpretation. Here, the linkages to theories which seek to understand and explain the historical process are crucial.

Marketing is standing at a crossroads today. It can either develop a scientific and therefore a socially relevant perspective to become part of human understanding and knowledge in the future, or it can limit itself in its ideological elements and eventually grow into oblivion. My hope is that, since it has great potential given its possible perspective and its relevance to important problems of humanity today, we as social scientists will be able to make the distinction between ideology and science, then select the route of science.

NOTES

1. Still, in many cases the underlying premise is that, while when the perception of need for a car and/or TV set will develop is social, the fact that at some time or another such a need perception will develop is given. That is, many scholars tend to consider needs as part of “human nature” at times latent but finally actualized due to economic and technological developments. For these scholars it would be difficult to accept the alternative premise that the nature of a particular need itself is social.

2. The historical evidence and experience in science questions the possibility of even a concept such as the universal given.

3. In this context, the structural equation models methodology presents great potential (Bagozzi, 1980).

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THE CONFLICT BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper starts with an analysis of the structure of paradigms, emphasizing the links between the paradigm and the ideology of the society in which the science is exercised.

By formulating an alternative to the existing paradigms of marketing, other scientific disciplines such as phenomenology, structuralism, and Freudian psychology are introduced to marketing communication.

I. WHY ALL THE INTEREST IN PARADIGMS?

For the last few years a small but increasing number of scientists within marketing have been interested in what hidden forces lie behind the present research in marketing.