Abstract

The last five years have witnessed both ideological and intellectual ferment in marketing. The broadening of the marketing concept, the rebirth of macro-marketing theories and concepts, the relativist methodology with its emphasis on humanism and holism, the use of an historical approach as well as the reawakening of interest in comparative marketing are all mechanisms of self-reflexivity in marketing. It is argued here that marketing as a form of cultural critique can occur through the use of two techniques: (1) defamiliarization through epistemological critique; (2) defamiliarization through cross-cultural juxtaposition. In both instances, it requires that the researcher be implicated in his or her research, be committed to detailed descriptions of marketing reality in a larger political-economic context (nationally or globally), and recognize that all cultural systems, which includes theirs, are ultimately constructed, or fashioned realities.

Introduction

A quick examination of the articles in the major journals of marketing of the last five years suggests that there is much ideological and intellectual ferment over what constitutes marketing knowledge and how this knowledge system is generated, tested, verified and interpreted (Anderson 1983: Deshpande 1983; Dhoklalia & First 1980; Hirschman 1986; Hunt 1983; Peter & Olson 1983). The broadening of the marketing concept (Kotler & Levy 1981), the emergence of macro-marketing (Bartels 1983), the emphasis on an historical approach (Savitt 1980), the importance placed on comparative marketing (Boddevyn 1981), and the use of humanistic inquiry (Levy 1981; Hirschman 1986; Shorry 1983) have all been mechanisms by which self-reflexivity in marketing has occurred.

In this paper I argue that marketing should continue to examine the basis and assumptions of its system of knowledge. As a form of cultural critique it should question the taken-for-granted assumptions as well as raise havoc with the usual ways of "seeing" and understanding market phenomena. It is clear that, in the field of marketing at least, in the last few years there has been a great deal of uncertainty about adequate and appropriate ways of describing social reality. "Problems of description (thus) become problems of representation" (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 9). Older frameworks have been suspended and paradigmatic authority questioned.

In the broadest sense, cultural criticism has been both a critique of ideology as well as a critique of social institutions and everyday cultural forms (Marcus & Fischer 1986). It requires that an individual critic be not only aware of the assumptions behind his or her own ideas, but also be able to see viable alternatives to the situations under scrutiny.

In marketing this form of cultural critique is possible using techniques that are similar to those utilized in anthropology (Marcus & Fischer 1986). They are as follows: (1) defamiliarization through epistemological critiques; (2) defamiliarization through cross-cultural juxtaposition. We will discuss each in turn.

Defamiliarization Through Epistemological Critique

As mentioned above, there has been much discussion over the nature and scope of marketing. A critical focus of this discourse has been over the advantages and limitations of logical empiricism (Anderson 1983), as well as the importance of relativism as a guiding framework for marketing research and theory. Underlying these concerns is a general disenchantment with the way in which empiricism has contributed to a hegemonic way of "seeing" and defining what the appropriate concerns of marketers are, and ways in which to deal with them.

The relativist framework, with its emphasis on humanism and on the participatory consciousness of the individual and the interpretive process, focuses on the meaning of objects, events, and experiences in the lives of individuals.

This emphasis on a more "holistic" approach is not entirely new to the discipline of marketing. For several decades marketing was viewed as an economic activity embedded in a social context (Bartels 1983). The shift in perspective, narrower in scope, came as a result of the association of marketing practitioners with marketing scholars, and of the increasing emphasis on applied knowledge. This in turn led to the predominant use of empirical research techniques and increased the gap between researchers with a theoretical focus and those with applications/management orientation. Consequently, it has also resulted in a general disinclination to incorporate into marketing theory important concepts such as a cultural, relational, global, and comparative marketing (Bartels 1983; Boddevyn 1981; Dhoklalia 1982). Thus macro-marketing, with its redirected emphasis on "marketing as a social process", redresses this imbalance and provides a critique of the knowledge generation process.

Many of the problems and issues discussed above are not unique to marketing but apply to other social sciences as well. In particular, anthropology underwent a similar metamorphosis before it could make claims to providing a cultural critique. Since anthropological techniques and frameworks have been used in the study of marketing, it will be useful to consider briefly and bring to bear on our discussion, some insights from this discipline.

Defamiliarization through epistemological critique occurred in anthropology primarily through the study of other cultures. The study of alternative cultural ways raised havoc with our own ways of "seeing" and loosened some of our own taken-for-granted assumptions of human nature and social and cultural realities (Marcus & Fischer 1986). In other words the study of the (profoundly alien) "other" contributed in large measure to our understanding of the culturally-constructed nature of our own world. Once we recognize that we live in as much of a culturally constituted world as others, it is possible to begin to discuss substantive differences as well.

In the early decades of anthropology, the "self" and "other" were seen as essentially independent of one another, and observation was considered an objective act to describe the "other". Such abstract description, it was believed, in no way influenced the true significance of the subject under study. The disembedded, objective knowledge of the "other" was thought to be possible (Doyer 1982). A variation on this theme, although much more humanistic in content, was the subjective search for the concrete (Diamond 1974). Although the life history method was used to generate such an understanding, the anthropologist was seen primarily as a scribe or as an editor documenting cultural narratives and personal histories. Thus the ethnographer was viewed in an ideally objective and passive role, and the subjectivity of the "other" was recognized without interaction with the subject.

The search for such abstract or concrete knowledge did not go uncontested, especially by scholars who recognized the limits of the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity, and the inter-subjective nature of knowledge construction (Geertz 1973: Bourdieu 1977; Rabinow 1977). The work done by Geertz...
(1973) will be considered here since marketing scholars have been largely influenced by the interpretive tradition and his notion of the "self." Geertzian (1973) anthropology is an interpretive quest with its focus on meaning. The ethnographic endeavour is thus a "constructed" activity because the subjectivity of the anthropologist bears upon his or her interests and concerns, and he or she becomes a cultural phenomenon in the light of these concerns. Thus the "self" is very clearly implicated in the study of the "other" and the anthropologist's role, Geertz (1973) argues, is guessing at shared cultural meanings.

The critique of symbolic studies in the Geertzian tradition has occurred on two levels. Firstly, while cultural meanings may be shared, it is also important to understand the cultural control and distribution of meaning. Even in the most egalitarian societies, the negotiation and control of knowledge occurs and symbolic analysis does not pay much attention to such processes. We need to ask who creates and defines cultural meanings, and to what ends (Keesing 1987). Secondly, Geertz refuses to see the interdependence of the anthropologist and the respondent at the very origin of the search for information (Dreyer 1982). This is further exemplified in his definition of culture as an "assemblage of texts which the anthropologist straies to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (Geertz 1973: 452).

For Geertz, thus, the dialectical confrontation of the "self" and "other" does not occur in the field as much as in the writing of ethnography. To him, changes in theory are made in relation to prior knowledge or related studies, and less from the historical and social actions of the anthropologist himself or herself.

For a number of more recent anthropologists experimenting with new genres in ethnographic writing, the anthropological endeavour does not lie in observation or contemplation, but in the implementation of a project in which a specific historical "self" confronts a specific historical "other." This confrontation can be described in terms of its "sequential, contingent and embedded nature" (Dreyer 1982: 280). For the anthropologist who works in this tradition, it means: (1) a recognition of the fact that meaning is constructed in a recursive and sequential manner; (2) that this meaning is not only generated in the successful encounters, but also in various situations where the encounter was disrupted; and (3) that each individual brings his or her own historic and interests to the confrontation. Thus, as Dreyer (1982) observes, the "event plus the dialogue motif" must be seen not as a model, but as a suggestive metaphor for an ethnography that is self-referential.

Thus for anthropology to be effective as cultural critique, the ethnographer must realize that he or she is implicated in the research. In addition, there must be scrupulous commitment to detail, combined with a rhetoric of self-doubt (Marcus & Cushman 1982). Regardless of the differences among the various scholars discussed above, they all share in the belief that all cultural systems, which includes theirs, are constructed realities. Disruption of common sense, placing familiar objects in unfamiliar contexts, and doing the unexpected are all elements of this strategy. The challenge of cultural critique, as Marcus and Fischer (1986) observe, is to bring insight gained from other contexts back to the centre, to where we are, and to "raise havoc with our settled ways of seeing and thinking".

Marketing
Marketing knowledge in the North American context, it can be argued, is as much culturally constructed as it is in other contexts (Dholakia, Firt and Bagozzi 1980). Once this fundamental unity is recognized there is a more valid basis for considering substantive differences. The defamiliarization process in marketing has occurred at several levels. We will begin with a discussion of such a critique as applied to consumer behaviour.

The Constitution of Cultural Categories in the North American Context
McCranck (1986) provides a good example of this form of cultural critique in his discussion of the mobility of meaning conveyed through consumer goods. He argues (1986: 71) that "cultural meaning flows continually between its various locations in the social world, aided by collective and individual efforts of designers, producers, advertisers and consumers." Further he (1986: 50) goes on to say that "our culture has studied its own beliefs and practices with a thoroughness and enthusiasm in the ethnographic record. With the same thoroughness and enthusiasm it has also made material possessions one of its most compelling preoccupations. It is doubly odd and unfortunate that the study of the use of goods in the construction of "self" and the world would have suffered such prolonged and profound neglect".

The focus on "person-object" relations and material culture has shown that what gets produced, for instance in the clothing industry, depends on a prior classification of status, the mutual histories of objects and people. Production in this sense follows a definite cultural logic. Thus McCranck's study can be seen as a critique of utilitarian and materialist thought. In the tradition of Sahlin (1976), he makes the case that culture mediates our perceptions of what is natural. By showing how advertising and the fashion system create classifications, he defamiliarizes the process for us. It is in this sense that he provides cultural criticism. What we take for granted as "natural" is actually built upon an arbitrary cultural logic.

The contribution of such an approach lies in its richness and in the insights it offers through a holistic approach. Here the researcher does not juxtapose the alien "other" with the "self" as consciously as the anthropologists do, but examines the "self" from multiple perspectives and brings into relief the cultural construction process.

Yet there is something a little unsatisfactory in his analysis. Granted he is not interested in the control of meaning created and exercised by cultural organizations (Habermas 1976), yet there is no indication as to how cultural analysis is linked to historical and political factors. It does not, therefore, raise questions about cultural dominance and how meaning structures are formed and negotiated by competing segments within a society (Keesing 1987). Such questions are raised by Rogers (1986) in his discussion of the role of the critical school of social research in consumer research. He argues that consumer researchers should focus on the contexts of consumption and, in particular, on the ownership and control of systems affecting individual consumer behaviour. Secondly, he argues that cross-cultural juxtaposition of questions central to consumer research be raised and, finally, that the ethical aspects of consumer behaviour be brought into focus which addresses directly the question of "knowledge for what purposes" and "knowledge for whom." Tying ethnographic details to larger political processes might be one way to do so (Schneider 1987). We will discuss the political economy framework a little later on.

The De-Amerization of Marketing Thought
deal with the issue of the national context within which marketing as a discipline grew. They argue that marketing concepts are a product of a North American capitalist system which hampers the emergence of a universal conception of the nature and scope of marketing. They also argue that it is this North American orientation that fosters the emphasis on a managerial, as well as buyer behaviour approach. At best they note that this form of marketing knowledge is partial in its focus and lacks historicity.

While the above scholars identified the problems of applying marketing knowledge generated in North America to other cultural contexts, there were other scholars who pointed to the inadequacies of this approach even within North America. Sweeney (1972) argued that to view marketing as a set of techniques employed by an organization is to reduce it to a more set of organization skills. Since it focusses on the organization as the unit of analysis, it hampers the process of linking the organization with the social system of which it is a part. Further, it reduces the buyer to the status of being passive and peripheral to the marketing process and finally evaluates performance and effectiveness from the perspective of the organization and not from other factors such as social appropriateness, etc.

An Historical Approach to Marketing

In marketing there has been renewed interest in using such an approach as evidenced by the increasing number of articles, as well as workshops, in marketing history. The ethnocentric bias in marketing is thus tempered by our understanding not only of the markets and marketing processes in other cultures, but also of the evolution of markets and marketing ideas in our own (Savitt 1980).

Historical research compliments the emphasis on holism, the attempt to understand the present in terms of the number of transformations of the phenomenon in the past, as well as the historico-political linkages with other cultures.

Defamiliarization Through Cross-Cultural Juxtaposition

In contrast to what was discussed in the first section, this process works at a more explicitly empirical level, involving a number of dramatic comparisons and contrasts. As Marcus and Fischer (1986) note, it is a matching of ethnography of other cultures with our own. The idea is to use specific facts that are contextually located in other cultures to probe into the specific facts of a subject at home. By definition anthropologists have used this technique extensively to justify cultural relativism. Despite the methodological problems inherent in such an approach, it forces us to consider particular societies and particular historical situations which is really the strength of an ethnographic approach. But this is also the problem with such an approach. The tendency to de-contextualize facts and stereotype behaviour is so vast that what is presented as criticism is often disembodied and inappropriate. But, in the language of Marcus and Fischer (1986), such cultural criticism is valued not so much for its shock value as for its encouragement of a prolonged sophisticated discourse that engages the reader.

Marketing

In marketing there is a whole school of thought that has until recently been relatively ignored by the mainstream: comparative marketing (comparative exchange systems). According to Shapiro (1963), there is a great potential for enriching what our understanding of marketing is when looked at from a comparative, cross-cultural perspective. Methodological insights provided by Bartels (1983) and elaborated by Boddevyn (1981) form the basis for much of this research.

According to Boddevyn (1981), the ignorance expressed by marketing scholars of foreign sources and practices has created an ethnocentric bias. He deplores the fact that what goes under the term comparative marketing replicates abroad what is familiar and fashionable at home. Finally, he argues that the search be expanded for concepts, facts, and theories which transcend country, class, and product limitations.

Boddevyn (1981) recommends the use of an historical approach to the study of commodities, marketing functions, flows or institutions in a society. This will not only help us understand the ways in which marketing is done in these cultures, but also what is taken for granted in our own.

Even when explicit comparative statements are not made it is important to look at how marketing is embedded in specific cultural contexts. In this regard, Naor’s (1986) article on marketing in Romania is particularly interesting. The paper is structured around the idea of “establish the context within which marketing activities currently take place in Romania, and to offer a socialist Romanian version of the marketing concept including the assessment of its application in practice” (Naor 1982: 28). The implications of such a study are many, not only for developing countries but also for the U.S. In particular, he argues that close attention be paid to macro-marketing planning for market economies such as ours, troubled by resource shortages and competitive pressures. As he notes, if nothing else the Romanian case provides an alternative way of examining the nature and scope of marketing.

A Political Economy Approach

In its simplest form this approach suggests the linkages and interdependencies between the political and economic spheres of any society. In marketing this approach has been used by Arndt (1981, 1983), Hutt, Mokwa and Shapiro (1986), Dholakia and Sherry (1987). Indeed, Arndt (1981) goes so far as to say that political economy may be an appropriate basis for developing a conceptual framework for comparative marketing, by focussing on the links between managers, consumers, and their socio-political environment.

Further, the political economy framework considers the interplay of power between markets, politics, and bureaucracies at the macro level. There are different schools of thought within this approach such as the radical school, the Chicago school, and the organizational school. Arndt (1981) positions himself in the last school and is concerned with integrating insights from social exchange, the behaviour theory of the firm, and transactional cost economies.

More radical approaches to political economy are evidenced in the work of Dholakia (1984), Dholakia and Sherry (1987), and Joy and Ross (1987). Here political and economic linkages across nations are seen as the basis for the analysis, and marketing is described as one of the most potent vehicles of change. Further, marketing works to differentiate the core from the periphery in capitalist systems. In these assumptions, it is clear that these researchers work in the tradition of scholars such as Frank (1967) and Wallerstein (1979).

Dholakia and Sherry (1987), for instance, argue that marketing reflects the norms and values of the society in which it is embedded, to which it can be added that it indeed even contributes to changes within the system. This principle is also relevant in the context of third-
world countries where global strategies of large multi-
nationals have been very successful. However, the point
is not so much that third-world consumers can be segmented
and targeted successfully, but how these products are
incorporated and redefined, both at the collective and
individual contexts of their lives.

Despite the inherent appeal of this approach, there are
certain problems that need to be addressed. To focus
primarily on unequal exchange, as most radical approaches
do, is to neglect the crucial dimensions of interconnect-
erness. Despite the disruptive and dominating effects
of metropoles, they also represent opportunities for
ideas, institutions and technologies (Joy & Ross 1987).
Secondly, this approach does what modernization theories
do: lump together all cultures in the periphery. It
denies their internal dynamics and renders them passive
(Nash 1981). It is important, therefore, to remind our-
selves that: "Capitalism is inherently uneven and cap-
italism generates variation as inevitably as it generates
inequality ... It might therefore be more heuristically
useful to examine cultural distinctions not as grafts
on to an otherwise unswerving process of modernization,
but rather as parts of the very process itself" (Smith

The Ethnographic Node in Political Economy

In general, a more radical approach is recommended as
the macro-framework to begin the analysis. However,
given the above problems, the analysis does not stop
here. What is needed are "thick descriptions" that ex-
plain "the logico-integrative schemes" within the cultures
and how they interact with the larger system of which
they are a part (Nash 1981). Thus, without detailed
studies of regions and historical periods, the analysis
is not complete. As Nash (1981) has argued, without
ethnographic analysis one can only imagine what is hap-
pening to real people caught up in such macro-processes.
Ethnography is thus the "sensitive register of change
at the level of experience" (Marcus & Fischer 1986).

One mechanism by which researchers can gain an under-
standing of how consumption is affected by global market-
ing strategies is to study the cultural biography of
objects in a society. This requires an historical and
more holistic approach. As Appadurai (1986: 41) notes:
"objects represent complex social forms and distributions
of knowledge and production, knowledge and consumption
knowledge. Knowledge at both poles have technological,
mythological, and evaluative components, and the two poles
are susceptible to mutual and dialectical interaction".
Such an analysis will provide us with a fuller under-
standing of consumption phenomenon. We would, as
McCracken (1986) rightly points out, be able to consider
an object as a culturally constituted entity, endowed
with cultural meaning, and classified and reclassified
into culturally constituted categories.

Finally, if person-object relations are central to our
understanding of consumption processes and behaviour,
it is important to note that the definition of "person-
hood" or the "self" varies cross-culturally (Doumout 1970;
Geertz 1973; Schneider 1988). These studies have shown
that despite institutional homogenization, cultural dis-
tinctiveness has been maintained in differing concepts of
self and personhood. In addition to defamiliarizing our
own concepts of "self", such knowledge reiterates the
significance of the cultural construction of social
reality. Such texts are further meditations or reflec-
tions on the relationships of the anthropologists with
the cultures that they study.

Conclusions

It is clear from the above discussion that the ideology-
ological and intellectual ferment in marketing has come
from several sources. The broadening of the marketing
concept, the emergence and re-emergence of macro-marketing
theories and concepts, the relativist methodology with
its emphasis on humanism and holism, the use of an his-
torical approach, and the re-awakening of interest in
comparative marketing are all mechanisms by which we
- both historically and politically locate the discipline
of marketing. Such self-reflexivity is associated with
the maturity of a science and like other social sciences,
marketing is also undergoing a process of metamorphosis.
It has been argued that marketing can be seen as a form
of cultural critique and that the two techniques through
which this can be accomplished are: (1) the process
of defamiliarization through epistemological critique,
and (2) defamiliarization through cross-cultural juxtapos-
tion.

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