Economics, Psychology, and the Literature of the Subdiscipline of Consumer Behavior

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This paper traces the development of the subdiscipline of marketing known as "consumer behavior" and its literature which grew during the 1950s and 1960s and at an increasing rate during the 1970s. In spite of marketing's roots in economics, it came to rely more heavily on psychology as a source for conceptual borrowing. It is suggested that this may have resulted from greater congruity between marketing scholars and psychologists with respect to research purposes and philosophies of science.

INTRODUCTION

Although marketing scholars have always been interested in the behavior of consumers, the institutionalization of that interest is relatively recent. This paper is about the development of consumer behavior as a subdiscipline of marketing and, in particular, its intellectual ties to economics and psychology. It begins with a brief history of the institutions of the subdiscipline, from the research conferences of the 1950s, through the development of journals and textbooks, to the appearance of the Association for Consumer Research and maturation of the field. In a later section, the focus shifts to the development of the subdiscipline's literature. Traced as a developing body of books and papers by marketing scholars, the field grew during the 1950s and 1960s and at an increasing rate during the early 1970s.

In spite of marketing's roots in economics, psychology soon became the discipline from which the new field came to borrow most heavily. In the final section, it will be suggested that this resulted from greater congruity between marketing scholars and psychologists with respect to their research purposes and philosophies of science.

THE INSTITUTIONS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The process of institutionalization appears to have followed a pattern described by Ziman (1984), who claims that the development of an academic specialty follows a pattern of four stages.

At first the emerging specialty is only observable as a nodal point in the network of citations. Then scientists whose research is associated with this co-citation cluster organize little research conferences to discuss their common interest, or are commissioned to write articles for a special issue of a primary journal drawing attention to progress in this particular problem area. An "invisible college" begins to condense out, in the form, say, of a semi-official association held together by further conferences, the regular exchange of pre-prints and re-prints and the publication of an informal "newsletter." In due course, the association develops into a regular learned society, whose newsletter has become a reputable primary journal. A hierarchy of authority is soon set up to preside over conferences, edit journals, allocate resources, and confer recognition on members of the new discipline (p. 94).

Among the first "little research conferences" was the initial meeting of the Committee for Research on Consumer Attitudes and Behavior in 1952. Eventually, this group held five conferences, reported in four volumes of proceedings, with papers by scholars from many disciplines (Clark 1955a, b; 1958; Foote 1961). Other notable conferences were held at Stanford University in October 1964 and Purdue University in July, 1966. The Stanford conference, reported in a volume of papers edited by Newman (1966), included 22 attendees selected "because they were known for their advanced research and thinking about consumer behavior, and because they represented different orientations" (p. 4). The proceedings of the Purdue conference (Bass, King, and Pessemier 1967) contained the work of 20 "leading scholars [who]
were commissioned to write papers in the areas of their research specialization covering diverse contributions of the behavioral and quantitative sciences to Marketing” (p. 1).

The American Marketing Association (AMA) was cognizant of the growing importance of the study of consumer behavior; the Journal of Marketing (JMR) carried many “consumer behavior” articles during the 1950s and early 1960s. Further, in recognition of the importance of “motivational research” in the 1950s, the AMA sponsored a volume (Ferber and Wales 1958) to bring together, in the words of its President, D. Maynard Phelps, “a carefully selected group of articles on motivational research” chosen so that “readers can more easily secure a sound, well-balanced, critical view of the present status of motivation research and, particularly, in reference to market behavior” (p. 17).

In 1964, the AMA began publishing the Journal of Marketing Research (JMR), providing a new outlet for those doing research in the field. The apparent intention of the JMR was to provide a forum for methodological articles. As William R. Davidson, then AMA President, wrote in the first issue, “The objective . . . is to publish articles in the field of marketing research, defining this field in the broadest sense as the application of problem-solving methods and techniques to the solution of marketing problems” (Davidson 1964, p. 9). However, there were hints that the new journal might serve other intellectual needs; Davidson went on to speak of the “significant strides . . . being made in the application of quantitative methods and behavioral science approaches to marketing problems” (p. 9).

During the same period, the appearance of the “managerial approach” in the teaching of marketing specifically raised the question, “Why do people choose particular products and brands?” and textbooks began to reflect this focus. Two of the first marketing texts organized around the “four Ps” reflected this interest. Howard’s first edition of Marketing Management (1957) contained a chapter (5) called “Demand Analysis—Consumer Behavior” which was subdivided into sections called “The Buyer as Individual,” “The Influence of Other People,” and “The Influence of Social Stratification.” In the second edition (1963b), this discussion was greatly expanded and revised to include much more behavioral material and explicit models of “extensive problem solving,” “limited problem solving,” and “automatic response behavior.” The first edition of McCarthy’s Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach (1960) contained a section of six chapters on the consumer including two with considerable behavioral content, “Consumers: How They Behave” and “Consumers: How They Buy.”

For the growing number of courses in consumer behavior Bliss’ Marketing and the Behavioral Sciences (1963) presented a collection of 34 readings from economics, psychology and sociology intended as a text for “upper-level undergraduate and first-year graduate courses” (p. vii). Bliss noted that “The purpose of the book is to bring together a group of studies from these diverse areas in the belief that they can contribute to a better understanding of the field of inquiry which marketing people consider their own” (p. vii). In 1967, Myers and Reynolds published the first text with the words “consumer behavior” in its title. The market was soon dominated by Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1968).

At about the same time, the “invisible college” of researchers interested in consumer behavior was becoming more visible. In the summer of 1969, a group of scholars met in Columbus, Ohio, at the invitation of James Engel. Besides presenting papers, the group laid plans for a 1970 meeting in Amherst, Massachusetts, where the Association for Consumer Research (ACR) was formed. The organization’s second president, Robert Pratt recalled:

My first knowledge of interest in forming an Association was contained in a letter from Jim Engel dated September 16, 1969, in which he stated in part: “those in attendance unanimously agreed that we need a new organization cutting across the lines of various disciplines and organizations which are currently involved in or concerned with consumer behavior research. The organization is intended to bring in people from psychology, economics, all phases of industry, home economics, and other areas” (1971, p. 4).

From the initial meeting of 40 in Columbus, the new organization grew to 100 in its first full year of operation, 1971. Two hundred more joined in 1972 and by the end of 1973, membership was nearing 500 (Stafford 1973). Whatever its founders’ intentions, ACR’s membership was dominated by marketing academicians. In a 1973 membership survey 61 of 96 respondents were in marketing departments of academic institutions (Wells 1973). The 1977 membership survey showed about 60% of members were marketing academics with about 14% in other academic fields (Kerman 1977).

Meanwhile, the Association continued its annual conferences. Proceedings volumes started with the 1971 meeting; in 1973 they were renamed as Advances in Consumer Research. It should be noted that proceedings continue to make up an important segment of the literature of the field; a recent analysis of the citations in the Journal of Consumer Research shows that proceedings account for about 24% of all citations, compared to less than 3% in other academic fields (Leong 1989). In 1971, interest in founding a journal dedicated to consumer behavior began to coalesce (Kassarjian and Bettman 1984) and, in 1974, ACR joined with seven other scholarly organizations to start the Journal of Consumer Research (JCR).

As the 1970s neared their end, the subdiscipline was reaching maturity. As one sign, the rate of increase in publication was slowing down (Helgeson et al. 1984). Further, the new subdiscipline was starting to have a self-conscious history. Gardner’s (1977) “Presidential Address” at ACR’s 1976 Annual Conference looked to the beginnings of the field and spoke of Katona, Howard, Holloway, Bliss, and Nicosia as its “pioneers.” At the 1980 Conference, the first Fellow in Consumer Behavior awards were made to John Howard and James Engel.

LITERATURE OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

This section looks at the development of the literature of consumer behavior within marketing. Discussed first are its
growth and content, in particular its intellectual roots in economics and psychology. Each of those disciplines had its own literature of consumer behavior and, later in the section, these are examined.

Growth of the Body of Literature

The growth of the literature of a scientific discipline seems to follow the pattern of an innovation (Crane 1972). Helgeson et al. (1984) examined the growth of the literature of consumer behavior between 1950 and 1981. Although they did not fit a logistic curve to their data, they show that about 10 articles and proceedings papers per year were published in the 1950s, about 20 per year in the 1960s, and about 175 per year in the 1970s (p. 451). Beginning in 1971, the volume of consumer behavior literature grew at an accelerating rate for several years. Of course, this period coincided with the introduction of the ACR Proceedings and JCR.

As another indication of growth, the 141 papers listed in the Holloway, Mittelstaedt, and Venkatesan bibliography (the Appendix describes the bibliographies used in this study) approximate the entire empirical literature of the field in 1970. By comparison, the program of ACR’s 1988 Annual Meeting listed 181 papers, while 53 articles, “Comments,” “Rejoinders,” and pieces called “Research in Brief” were published that year in JCR.

Thus, the growth pattern of the literature of consumer behavior resembles that of an innovation with the period of rapid growth coinciding with the formation of ACR. As Crane (1972) has argued, periods of rapid growth are common to the literatures of most research areas. In her words,

Periods of exponential growth can occur because research are as, although generally small, are capable of being expanded at relatively short notice if scientists with secondary and tertiary commitments to an area decide to shift their research priorities. In other words, if a particular field becomes especially attractive, a pool of scientists somewhat on the periphery can be rapidly assimilated. In addition, new scientists are continually being trained who are relatively free of previous commitments and thus available to exploit promising areas (p. 24).

Table 1 shows the process by displaying the overlap of authorship of among “consumer behavior articles” (see Appendix for definition) in JM (1958–1963) and JMR (1964–1969), papers presented at ACR (1969–1975) and the Purdue conference (1964), and attendance at the Stanford conference (1964). In Table 1 these are arranged in an approximate time sequence. Looking at the first line, of the people who authored or co-authored consumer behavior articles in JM during the years 1958 through 1963: one participated in the Stanford Conference; 6 authored or co-authored a paper at the Purdue Conference; 16 published in JMR; 8 authored or co-authored a paper given at an ACR meeting; 81 appear only as authors of JM articles.

Based on Table 1, two observations seem merited. First, to the extent they were present in the previous literature, the people who participated in ACR during its formative years tended to have published in JMR. Second, and more important, a considerable number of new people were drawn into the field by the formation of ACR; of the 237 who presented papers at ACR, 268 had not previously published (during the years represented in Table 1) in JM nor in JMR, nor had they participated in the Stanford or Purdue conferences.

Changes in the Content of the Literature

From the 1950s through the mid-1970s many changes occurred in the content of the literature. Three related themes are evident: (1) a “micro” approach, i.e., a focus on the purchase behavior of individual consumers, (2) increased and changing concerns with methodology, and (3) the rise of conceptual borrowing from psychology and the decreasing reliance on economics.

As for the micro approach, Alderson had been urging the study of individual and household decision processes during the 1950s (1952; 1957). During the 1960s, this movement became embodied in at least five influential books. After claiming that “At this time, there is no really useful theory of buyer behavior, even of the most rudimentary sort,” (p. 69) Howard’s Marketing: Executive and Buyer Behavior (1963a) devoted about three fifths of its pages to an examination of individual buying behavior from the perspectives of economics, psychology, social psychology, and sociology. Nicosia’s Consumer Decision Processes (1966) grew out of the work of the Consumer Behavior Program at Berkeley. Drawing on the literatures of marketing, economics, and the behavioral sciences, its author developed a process model
to predict and explain the purchase behavior of a consumer. This same focus carried on into the first two books that were beginning to shape the field. Myers and Reynolds' *Consumer Behavior and Marketing Management* (1967) drew almost exclusively on the literature of psychology and social psychology. Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell's *Consumer Behavior* (1968) followed Nicosia's lead, using a behavioral model of the individual consumer's decision process as the organizational scheme of their text. Finally, Howard and Sheth's *The Theory of Buyer Behavior* (1969), while broadening the concept of "consumer" to include the industrial buyer, retained the focus on predicting and explaining the choices of the individual decision maker.

The effect of this trend in the research literature can be seen in the content analysis of Helgeson et al. (1984). The general topics of "internal factors" (e.g., attitudes, information processing) and "purchase processes" (e.g., choice, information search) make up over half of the literature. Early on, methodological concerns were less strong than they came to be; the majority of articles published in the 1950s were non-empirical and, of the empirical minority, most were descriptive. Beginning late in that decade, these proportions began to change; non-empirical papers declined to about 30% of the literature while descriptive studies nearly disappeared (Helgeson et al. 1984).

By the 1960s, the increased emphasis on hypothesis-testing research led to a focus on the experimental method. JMR's first issue contained an article in which Holloway described the work done in the behavioral laboratory he had established in 1962 (Holloway and White 1964). This paper laid the groundwork for a stream of papers which were published by him and his students in JMR over the next several years. The experimental method dominated the empirical literature of consumer behavior for the rest of the decade, accounting for as much as 45% of the literature in the period 1964 to 1968 (Helgeson et al. 1984). This reinforced the micro focus; as used in the laboratory (as contrasted with the field) the experimental method is suited only to study the behavior of individuals or very small groups. Of course, new topics meant new methodologies; the shift in topics toward the "internal factors," as noted above, was paralleled by an increasing use of multivariate statistics during the 1970s.

In addition to the changes in topics and methodologies, there were changes in the patterns of conceptual borrowing, as indicated by the citations of the developing body of literature. First, there appears to have been an increase in conceptual borrowing in general. Second, although their initial positions were roughly equal, psychology gradually came to replace economics as the discipline from which more borrowing was done.

Initially, borrowing appears to have been rather modest. As one indicator, an examination was made of the references cited in the eleven articles published in JMR between 1950 and 1959 that also appeared in two or more of the bibliographies of Bristol (1956), Nicosia (1966), Myers and Reynolds (1967), and Kassarjian and Robertson (1968). In general, all JMR articles of this period have few references and, of those, a relatively larger proportion are to books and monographs than to journals, a style noted by Goldman (1979). Taking that into account, the eleven articles contain a total of 62 references, 29 of which are in one article by Alderson, while three articles contain no references. In the aggregate, there are no citations to any articles in economic journals and only one citation of an article in a psychological journal. In a later period, of the 28 articles published in JMR in the period 1960–1965 and classified in the Index as "Consumer Analysis," 4 contain no reference, 7 cite at least one psychological work, while 5 cite at least one work from economics. (See Appendix for definitions.)

Turning to the first years of JMR, a sample of 20 consumer behavior articles (see Appendix for index categories used) was drawn from its first six volumes (1964–1969). Each article had at least one citation to a publication other than the JMR, JMR, or AMA Proceedings; the average was 23. Eight articles cited at least one psychological work; 6 cited at least one economics work.

The literature developing in the papers presented at ACR was more psychological in its focus. According to the first Index (Kassarjian and Orsini 1980), 32 people authored or co-authored 6 or more papers at the first ten conferences. In the years 1971–1975, they presented 108 papers (papers for the years 1969 and 1970 were unpublished.) These 108 papers average 11 citations to literatures other than the JMR, JMR, AMA Proceedings, or the JCR or ACR Proceedings. Seventy six cited at least one psychological work; only 10 cited any economic work (6 if Ferber's works are classified as "marketing"). However, it must be noted that this remained a marketing literature; 30 of these 32 authors were marketing academics and 87 of their papers cite at least one marketing source, for an average of 6.

The trend toward greater reliance on the psychological literature continued in the JCR. Leong's (1989) citation analysis of Volumes 1, 4, 7, 11, and 14 of JCR shows an increasing number of references to JCR itself. Using his data, and excluding the references to JCR, the proportion of citations from psychology journals stayed almost constant between the two volumes published in the 1970s and the three published in the 1980s (i.e., 32.8% and 32.6%, respectively). A parallel comparison of citations from economics journals shows 10.0% for those published in the 1970s and 5.7% for the 1980s (calculated from Table 1, Leong 1989). Goldman's (1979) citation analysis of JM and JMR between 1968 and 1976 showed similar results. He found a tendency toward greater reliance on marketing sources for referencing in both journals and a decline in the relative importance of economics citations from a level of 8–9% in 1968 to about 4–5% in 1976.

In summary, the period from 1950 to 1975 saw the institutionalization of consumer behavior as a subdiscipline in marketing. The literature began to grow during the mid-1960s and more rapidly during the 1970s. The formation of the ACR was pivotal. Although formed as a separate organization, its members and the literature which they generated retained a marketing focus. This literature became increasingly empirical and came to rely more on psychology than economics for its conceptual foundations.

Before discussing some reasons for these developments, attention should be given to the literatures of economics and psychology and, in particular, their own areas of "consumer
behavior. The developments in those fields during the same decades are the subject of the next section.

The Consumer Behavior Literatures of Economics and Psychology

Of the many changes underway in economics in the 1950s and 1960s, four are of special interest. First, the neoclassical approach to consumer choice, and its attendant interest in utility theory, had been resuscitated by Hicks (1939) and Samuelson (1947). Houthakker (1950) had made it amenable to econometric techniques. Brown and Deaton’s (1972) review of this literature shows 34 pieces published before 1930, 18 in the 1930s, 15 in the 1940s, with 65 published in the 1950s and 112 between 1960 and 1971. Much of this was empirical work, albeit with aggregated data, on the demand (including income and price elasticities) for various products, e.g., automobiles, meat.

Second, Stigler (1961) had focused attention on the role of information in determining the behavior of all actors in the market, and especially the search behavior of consumers. In addition to empirical research on prices (e.g., Jung 1960), this approach led to conceptual extensions to such issues as product quality (Akerlof 1970) and advertising (Nelson 1974).

Third, in a widely cited review article in the American Economic Review (AER), Ferber (1962) surveyed empirical research on household behavior (p. 48). His review covers 170 items, 51 of which are articles from economic journals. The centrality of the topic to the discipline of economics is evidenced by the fact that 43 of the 51 articles had been published in the “core” journals of the field (as defined by Eagley 1975).

Fourth, there was a modest increase in the sort of empirical studies that would be of direct interest to marketers. The Index of Economic Journals for the years 1950–1959 shows five articles published in economics journals (JMs), which was covered by the Index, was excluded from these counts) which are categorized as “Consumer Motivation, Brand Preference.” All of these appeared in the Journal of Farm Economics (JFE). It is difficult to generalize about their content except to say that the word “preference” appears in the titles of three of the articles. During the period 1960–1969, the number of articles in the same category rose to 17. Of these 6 were in the JFE and 2 were econometric studies appearing in “core” journals.

As for psychology, 35 articles from psychology journals were cited in the Annual Review of Psychology (ARP) during the 1950s. Of these, most concerned three topics: communications effects, attitudes toward products and sellers, and consumers’ ability to discriminate product differences. Nearly all appeared in the Journal of Applied Psychology (JAP).

During the 1960s this literature, most of it empirical, continued to grow at about the same rate. Combining the three ARP articles of the decade with the relevant entries from the Jacoby review (1975), at least 45 articles were published in psychology journals during the 1960s. Characterizing them as a group becomes more difficult; old themes continued while new ones such as attitudes and social influences emerged, along with an increased interest in methodology, especially measurement issues. Again, most appeared in JAP.

The behavior of consumers is a central conceptual issue for microeconomic theory. By contrast, the behavior of consumers is an “applied” area for psychologists. Perhaps for that reason, the two literatures were quite separate during this period.

That the economics and psychology literatures were separate entities can be shown by looking at co-citations. Ferber’s AER review (1962) of “household decision making” cited 170 items. Of these, only four are cited in any of the ARP reviews. Further, comparing all the items covered in the ARP bibliographies for the two decades with the Brown and Deaton review, there are no common citations.

As a consequence of this separation, marketing scholars were induced to choose between the two. In spite of the talk of “economic psychology” and the work of such people as Katona, the marketing scholar who would borrow from both fields needed to be familiar with the literatures of two very distinct disciplines.

One result can be seen in the papers presented in the first years of ACR; those familiar with the literature of psychology came to the fore. Table 2 describes the writings of the 114 marketing academics who authored or co-authored consumer behavior articles in JMR during the years 1964–1969. As before, the separation of the two literatures is evident; only three people cited works from both psychology and economics. Looking at the second line, it indicates that, of the 55 who cited at least one psychology work in their JMR article, 20 authored or co-authored a paper at ACR during the years 1969–1975. If citing a literature indicates some familiarity with it, it appears that those with some background in psychology were more likely to be authoring ACR pieces.

Summary and Conclusions

In spite of a shared interest in the behavior of consumers by scholars in marketing, psychology, and economics, the study of consumer behavior became institutionalized as a subdisci-
pline in marketing as scholars in that field created their own, new literature. It began with roughly equal ties to economics and psychology but came to rely much more heavily on psychology. This phenomenon appears to go back at least to the late 1950s and early 1960s—a period crucial to the development of the subdiscipline of consumer behavior.

This final section offers some observations on the reasons for the particular path taken in the consumer behavior literature. It first discusses the congruence, or lack thereof, between marketing, economics, and psychology with respect to each discipline’s approach to research, and then their objectives for studying consumer behavior. By way of a conclusion, the familiar issue of the “rational economic man” is discussed and related to differences among the disciplines’ philosophies of science.

Approaches to Research

A field which borrows its conceptual frameworks and methodological tools faces a peculiar “assimilation” problem. Without broaching the subject of whether or not marketing is a science, there is little doubt that it has been a conceptual borrower from other fields. As Bartels (1988) points out, marketing people have tended to look at borrowed concepts as “tools.” Further, as he shows, there has been a long tradition of empirical research in marketing. In other words, it is a common pattern for marketing scholars to borrow concepts from other disciplines and use them in their research to explain the phenomena with which they are concerned. By contrast, the focus in economics and academic (as contrasted to clinical) psychology has been on developing theories and viewing research as a means to test them. Thus, the discipline of marketing needed its own consumer behavior literature.

Congruity of Objectives

The lack of congruity in approaches to research is related to differences in objectives between the fields of inquiry. Although this might be described as an issue of “level of aggregation,” it is useful to consider the differences between the three fields with respect to the explanandum of consumer behavior theory.

In the neoclassical formulation of economic theory, the behavior of individual consumers is not the explanandum but, rather, a major input into a systematic examination of more aggregative outcomes. As MacFadyen (1986) puts it,

Social scientists from other disciplines should not be misled by the term microeconomics, since its primary focus is upon aggregates; in particular, while the neoclassical analytical model derives from hypothesized behaviour of individuals, the empirical and policy analysis focuses almost exclusively on the behaviour of groups of people, particularly as expressed in levels of price and total production and/or consumption in economic markets (p. 29).

By contrast, psychology is concerned with the prediction, explanation, and control of individual behavior. Among marketing scholars there were differences about explicit dependent variables (e.g., attitude formation, attitude change, the initial purchase act, repurchase, etc.). However, as noted earlier, there was general agreement that consumer behavior was about the behavior of individuals or, at least, aggregates no larger than a household. In this sense, the objectives of psychology were more compatible with the objectives being sought by marketing scholars.

Congruity of Philosophies of Science

Much has been said and written about the appropriateness of the “rational economic man” as a model of consumer behavior. Instead of reviewing that long standing discussion, this final section examines the differing concepts of “rationality” in marketing, economics, and psychology during the period and the philosophies of science which accompany them.

By the early 1960s, marketing practice and, to some extent, the marketing literature had been influenced by three models of consumer behavior. First, the Behaviorism of the pre-World War II era depicted the consumer as a non-rational being whose behavior consists of responses to stimuli as shaped by the person’s history of reinforcements (Mittelstaedt and Madden 1980). While never an especially popular approach in the consumer behavior literature of the 1950s and 1960s, one variant, the Hullian learning model, was at the heart of Howard’s (1963a) original model of consumer behavior. Second, by the 1950s, marketing practice and thought were greatly influenced by “motivational research.” Based on Psychoanalytic Theory, this approach pictured the consumer as an irrational being who purchased products for their symbolic value in some idiosyncratic psychodrama, rather than for the utilitarian purposes assumed by economic theory (Mittelstaedt and Madden 1980). However, by the end of the decade, many marketing scholars and practitioners were moving away from this view (cf. Alderson 1958; Politz 1958; Levitt 1960). Coming to the fore were various models from social psychology, most notably Reference Group Theory. To the extent these models relied on some form of “conformity” as their central explanatory mechanism, they pictured the behavior of any one consumer as non-rational in the sense that it would be determined by that person’s perceptions of the behavior of other people (Mittelstaedt and Madden 1980). In short, by the mid-1960s, marketing practice and theory had been influenced by a variety of behavioral approaches which rejected, in one way or another, the concept of “rational” behavior.

Meanwhile, other changes were occurring in economics and psychology. Within the discipline of economics, the concept of the “rational economic man” had always had its critics. Clarkson (1963) argues that the debate between competing theories of utility and demand has been, at root, a philosophical one over the criteria to be used in judging the empirical validity of microeconomic theory. In his words,

On the one side it has been held that the truth value of the micro-theories should depend on the empirical reality of their assumptions. Other economists were of the opinion that it did not matter whether these...
assumptions were descriptively realistic or not since at best they had to consist of abstractions from actual behavior (p. 84).

Because of disciplinary differences, putting labels on these views may only engender confusion so they are referred to here as the "first view" and the "second view."

Clearly, the first view includes the institutional economists; writers from Veblen to Galbraith have been highly critical, if not contemptuous, of the rational economic man model. By the late 1950s, the second view, embraced by the neoclassical school, was in ascendancy. Friedman (1953) put the matter in very strong terms:

The relevant question to ask about the "assumptions" of a theory is not whether they are descriptively "realistic," for they never are, but whether they are sufficiently good approximations for the purpose at hand. This question can be answered only by seeing whether the theory works, which means it yields sufficiently accurate predictions (p. 15).

Like economics, psychology had never been a monolithic discipline, and the same dispute over the empirical reality of assumptions divided the field. By the 1950s Behaviorism, which held to the second view, was still dominant in American psychology (Hilgard 1987, Chapter 7). However, as Bindara (1985) shows, the 1940s and 1950s had set loose a set of forces which would lead to the displacement of Behaviorism by more cognitive approaches. This shift, which Hilgard (1987) calls the "cognitive revolution," took psychology toward a philosophy much like the first view (Manicas and Secord 1983).

As noted previously, during the 1950s Alderson (1952; 1957) had been making a strong case for considering consumer behavior as "problem solving" and this view grew in popularity, coming to fruition in the Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell model which formed the organizing structure of their widely used textbook (1968). Thus, during the 1960s, the view of consumer behavior that was gradually being accepted by marketing scholars emphasized the necessity for realistic assumptions. At the same time, a form of microeconomic theory at odds with this view was in ascendancy in economics, while Cognitive Theory, and its implicit realism, was coming to the fore in psychology. In the end, it proved to be the more persuasive.

Of course, there is more than a little irony in all of this. While the problem solving approach did not view the consumer as, strictly speaking, rational, it was a far cry from the models of various forms of nonrationality which characterized the Behaviorist, Motivational Research, and Reference Group theories. By the late 1960s, research utilizing an "information processing" approach began to appear in the literature. Like the problem solving approach, this metamodel viewed consumer behavior as goal seeking and added elaboration to the actual decision making processes. At the crucial time in the development of the subdiscipline of consumer behavior, marketing scholars explicitly or implicitly rejected the model of rational economic man and embraced a psychological model which pictured consumers as goal seeking, problem solving, information processing persons.
ECONOMICS, PSYCHOLOGY, AND THE LITERATURE OF THE SUBDISCIPLINE OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Serials Catalog. Books, monographs and other items were classified “psychological” if they had been authored by any of the 108 recipients of the American Psychological Association’s “Awards for Distinguished Scientific Contributions.” Added to that list was Martin Fishbein. Books, monographs and other items were classified “economic” if they were authored by any Fellow of the American Economic Association or Nobel Laureate in Economics. Although the works of Robert Ferber and George Katona are considered by many to be “marketing,” they were included among the economists. The works of Herbert Simon which were encountered seemed to be more clearly “psychological” than “economic” and were so classified. With one exception noted in the text, the classifications of Fishbein, Ferber, Katona and Simon did not affect any counts.

“Consumer behavior” articles from the JM were those which appeared in that journal’s Index under the headings “Buying and Purchasing,” “Consumer Analysis,” and “Research and Research Techniques.” Those classified as “consumer behavior” in the JMR are those which appeared in that journal’s Index under the headings “Attitude and Opinion Measurement,” “Brand Loyalty and Preference Studies,” and “Consumer and Market Area Research.”

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