SCIENTIFIC METHOD, MARKETING THEORY DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC VS PRACTITIONER ORIENTATION: A REVIEW

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This article presents a critical review of two highly debated issues — the metatheoretical underpinnings of marketing science, and academic versus practitioner orientation of marketing theory development. It identifies the major factors underlying these controversies, discusses their relevance for the development of marketing and argues that knowing the objectives of marketing and the ways to achieve them are more important than determining whether marketing is a science. The academics and practitioners are the two most important shapers of marketing knowledge who should pursue both basic as well as applied research and adopt contextually related methodological pluralism in their research efforts.

INTRODUCTION

The appropriate subject matter and breadth for the marketing discipline became a hotly debated issue in the 1950s and remained so for almost four decades (cf. Arndt 1982). However, in the last two decades, two new, but related issues have overshadowed this controversy. The first, which concerns the metatheoretical underpinnings of marketing science (Leong 1985), seeks to answer whether marketing is a scientific discipline according to the methods of physical sciences. The second, on the other hand, is a debate between the academic and practitioner orientation of marketing theory development that deals with the question whether the “theories” developed by marketing practitioners are as useful as those developed by academic researchers. The basic objective of this paper is to identify the main issues underlying these controversies and to discuss their relevance and importance for the development of marketing as a discipline.

There has been much controversy regarding the scientific method. On the premise that the domain of science is much broader, many scholars reject the notion that science is limited to the true science such as mathematics and physical science, and scientific methods are the only means that lead to indisputable results. They subscribe to the notion of unity of science in diversity and believe that physical science, mathematics and philosophy are three branches that sprung from a common stem; and in terms of scientificness, each presents a more or less ordered series (Davies 1973). This paper also examines whether this contention can be extended to the discipline of marketing.

SCIENCE AND NON-SCIENCE

The word “science” — which has its root in the Latin word scientia meaning knowledge— is an interesting, albeit confusing, expression since it denotes both the end product of some special activity or process as well as the activity itself. While it refers to the systematized body of accumulated knowledge that forms the subject matter of the sciences such as Physics and Chemistry, it has also been used to refer to the means to this end i.e., the scientific method, that concerns the systematic manner of obtaining this knowledge or information (Barratt 1971). The word’s high prestige value has led to its use in inappropriate contexts such as “Scientific Palmistry” to deceptively glorify a subject. However, justifying the validity of its use in contexts such as “Marketing Science”, “Political Science” etc., requires certain criteria. The history of philosophy of science indicates that much of the arguments about the scientificity of a subject arose mainly from the lack of a proper definition of the term (see Oldroyd 1986). For example, “Is Marketing a Science?” has remained a question without a definitive answer for the last four decades.

Although all sciences consist in knowing, not every form of knowing can qualify as science. It then implies the existence of
non-science as well. Criteria to separate a science from a non-science have been debated from the very beginning of Western philosophy (Laudan 1980). Popper (1962:42) viewed this problem of demarcation as the "key to most of the fundamental problems of the philosophy of science". But philosophers have failed to agree on a universally acceptable set of demarcation criteria: there exists different interpretations of the unity of sciences concept. Consequently, the likelihood of some non-science subjects being labeled as sciences could not be completely ruled out. Some scholars believe that the problem of demarcation is inextricably linked with the scientific method (Anderson 1983:18). To obtain a clear understanding of the issue it is appropriate to investigate how marketing scholars view the nature of scientific knowledge.

NATURE OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND MARKETING

Buzzell (1965) viewed science as a classified and systematized body of knowledge organized around one or more central theories and a number of general principles. Usually expressed in quantitative terms, this knowledge permits the prediction and, under certain circumstances, the control of future events. Since marketing is not "organized around one or more central theories", Buzzell concluded that marketing is not a science. However, criticizing this stand as too restrictive since "it confuses the successful culmination of scientific efforts with science itself"; Hunt (1976a:25) viewed that "withholding the label science until a discipline has central theories would not seem reasonable". For him a field of inquiry is science if it (i) has a distinct subject matter; (ii) presupposes the existence of underlying uniformities in the subject matter; and (iii) employs the scientific method. He found no reason "to presume that the scientific method of analysis is any less appropriate to marketing phenomenon than to other disciplines".

SCIENTIFIC METHOD

The word methods has been derived from the Greek word methodos meaning the way or manner of doing something or a means to reach an end. Combining this with the term scientific, the expression means pertaining to knowing or knowledge. To define in simple manner, scientific method is the way to proceed from a known starting point (the realm of known knowledge) to an unknown destination which, in one way or another, is believed to be linked with its initial starting point. The new Mathematical Philosophy of Galileo, the empiricism of Francis Bacon, the attempted rationalist enterprises of Descartes, and the outstanding success of Newton's actual science are all examples of scientific methods used by the respective scientists. Indeed, it is a myth to think that there is one and only one scientific method (Anderson 1982; Lutz 1982; Peter and Olson 1983).

For a long time the scientific method overwhelmed enthusiasts of scientific knowledge. Development of some specific set of rules, principles or structural requirements that would underlie all scientific researches and make scientific discovery more certain, have been an important issue in the agenda of the scientists. The scientific method was first developed by Sir Francis Bacon in 1620. In the Novum Organum—a work that dealt with the mastery of nature by the discovery of forms—he set forth its basic principles consisting of a well structured three step process: (i) accumulation by observation and experiment of as much information as possible; (ii) classification of these information into convenient categories; and finally (iii) search for the underlying explanation which would lead to the truth. This method was widely debated, refined by philosophers such as Hume and Mill, and used by scientists and researchers during the ensuing two centuries (Markland 1983:4).

However, the debate on, as well as the search for an ideal scientific method continued. Van Dyke (1960) described the scientific method to have three overall requirements: (i) verifiability, which includes two subsidiary requirements of empirical testing and reliability; (ii) systems, meaning organization into an intelligible pattern or structure with clear significant relationships; and finally, (iii) generality, which involves employing concepts and statements that apply to more and more objects, instances or events in any one class. On the other hand, Goldberg (1963) believed that the heart of scientific methods consists of, what he called, reproduction and verification. While reproduction refers to the means of arriving at theories or explanations of certain observed phenomena—intuition or "creative imagination"; verification or falsifiability is the process of phrasing a particular explanation into a logically universal statement which can then be subjected to empirical validation. Feigl (1953) stressed on intersubjectivity and public or communicable knowledge arrived at by tests which are replicable or subject to repetition by others with similar results. To Hunt (1976a, 1976b), the key element in the scientific method is intersubjective certification i.e., the ability of different investigators with different opinions, attitudes and beliefs to check the logic and make observations or conduct experiments to determine the truth content of the purported explanation. It implies that explanatory structures must be testable.

A LOOK INTO THE SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY LITERATURE

An investigator's ability to observe the phenomena of interest precisely and completely and to develop theories which not only explain known data but push on into unknown have been viewed as the two determinants of the power of scientific method (Tweney, Doherty and Mynatt 1981:323). During the last four centuries, scholars have proposed a variety of philosophical
perspectives regarding the nature and methodology of science which are confusing, imprecise, incomplete and conflicting with one another. Controversy exists over whether or not inductive inferences from empirical observations are a necessary condition for scientific inquiry, and whether one verifies or falsifies a truth claim. A brief overview of the major perspectives that have impact on the discipline of marketing along with a critical analysis of some of the debatable issues is presented below.

Two Broad Perspectives of Theory Building

Considering their basic conceptual similarities, the various perspectives of theory building can be broadly collapsed into two major groups (see Peter and Olson 1983). The first group consists of the logical positivists/empiricists (later referred to as P/E) who visualize theory construction as a process. The second group comprises the relativists/constructivists (later referred to as R/C) who construe theory construction as a structural whole of some kind. It would later be seen that these views, which are separately discussed below, are actually interactive in nature and they jointly determine the content of both scientific and practical knowledge (Bagozzi 1984).

The Positivist/Empiricist (P/E) School of Thought

According to the P/E proponents, the scientific process begins with the uncorrupted observation of reality enabling the researcher to develop his/her own version of the real world structure. From this structure, cognitively an a priori model of the process is generated which is then used to derive hypotheses for testing. If the data conform to the hypotheses, a confirming instance has been identified (Anderson 1983). Bacon, Comte, Carnap and Popper are a few of the major contributors to this school of thought. Popper deserves a special mention for his enthusiasm for falsificationism rather than verificationism, which had a tremendous impact on the philosophy of science. A diagrammatic representation of this school of thought is given in Figure 1. The unbroken arrows represent the sequence of the process, whereas the broken lines represent relationships which have come under attack by the proponents of the R/C school of thought.

The advocates of the P/E school of thought believe that reality is absolute and true, and through rigorous analysis of empirical observations it is possible to come closer to the truth. Their objective is to develop theories which reflect this view, are universal and useful. To them, empirical observations are objective data independent of any theory. However, it is the rigidity of the doctrines of realism and instrumentalism that are the greatest problems of this school of thought. While realism implies the existence of a direct relationship between scientific theories and the real world, instrumentalism proposes that the aim of science is to produce theories that are convenient devices or instruments for connecting one set of observed situations with another (Chalmers 1976:114-115).

The concentration is on theories and individual observations or sets of them; it ignores the complexities associated with the development of scientific theories. For example, non-observable phenomena are apparently excluded and no reference has been made to the social aspects of scientific enterprise. They ignore social factors as unimportant or irrational and emphasize the importance of logical models. But neither are concepts products of observations alone, nor is science independent of society or societal factors. These approaches represent a stereotyping of thinking centered mainly around abstractions of truth, realism, rationality, objectivity and universality of methods and are narrow and piecemeal.

Relativist/Constructivist (R/C) School of Thought

The shortcomings of the P/E school of thought paved the way for a new breed of scholars - later to become known as the relativists/constructivists (R/C) - to introduce a new attitudinal orientation and broader outlook toward the whole issue. These scholars are intellectual revolutionaries who shook the very base of the traditional wisdom. Working on some important Popperian ideas, a number of them later opposed Popperian philosophy. After examining the social dimension of epistemology in general and social aspects of scientific practice in particular, they concluded that science is a subjective entity having a social dimension. They viewed theories as structural wholes of some kind which are not entirely data driven as viewed by the P/E scholars. This drastic change of orientation originates in (i) the historical study of science which shows that theories are structures; (ii) the fact that concepts acquire precise meaning only by way of a coherently structured theory; and (iii) the need for science to grow (Chalmers 1976:75). Kuhn’s “Paradigms”, Lakatos’s “Research Programs”, Laudan’s “Research Traditions”, Feyerabend’s “Epistemological Anarchy” and finally, “The Cognitive Sociology of Science” are important contributions in this direction. The R/C proponents questioned the contention that science can have a definite set of methodological rules (Oldroyd 1986:319) and argued the validity of several areas of P/E thought and their suggested interrelationships (depicted in the P/E model, Figure 1). These areas are summarized in Table 1. Each tick mark (✓) represents an issue or an interrelationship between two issues – some of which are circuitous in nature.

Since human capacity to observe is rather limited, not everything in reality are (or can be) directly observable: radio waves are impossible to see, but special instruments can not only demonstrate their existence but can also measure them. It should be noted that positioning of correspondence rules (i.e., explicit definitions which co-ordinate theoretical terms with corresponding combinations of observation terms) in the system involves a subjective and arbitrary decision: one may opt to choose those rules which best fit the postulates
Figure 1
Positivist/Empiricist (P/E) View of Scientific Method

Positivist/Empiricist Premise

- Science is objective, rational and independent of any social/cultural dimensions.
- Scientific knowledge is absolute, cumulative and only the logic of justification is needed to understand science.
- There are specific rules for doing science which seeks truth through theories.
- Measurement procedures do not influence what is measured.

Legends:
Scientific Method
Issues of Debate

Journal of Marketing THEORY AND PRACTICE
Table 1

Debatable Issues: Concepts and Interrelationships

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relating that theoretical term to others. However, because of the problems inherent in the assessment of those postulates themselves, different theoreticians will choose to interpret observations in ways required to legitimize their perspective theoretical claims (Caballero and Ingram 1982: 41). The choice of the medium of correspondence, such as words and ideas, also adds a new dimension to this problem. Observations are perceptual phenomena and as such, can change the interpretation of reality. Observing the same thing two observers can come up with two different versions of the reality. Furthermore, effort to observe reality changes it (see Zukav 1979). The act of observing and measuring may interact with the phenomenon being observed or measured and change it. For example, questions on attitude may cause people to develop a point of view they did not otherwise have. Reconciling these types of observational differences is not easy.

Similar problems surface in relating theory with observation. Observations are constantly guided by some theories or hypotheses. One does not collect all the data from reality, only those which are dictated by a theory acting as a guide are collected. Hence, observations are theory-laden: they may lead to, and could be led from competing theories which are either to be verified or falsified to identify or select the best or the fittest one. This makes the task of developing objective criteria for observation problematic. The meaning of best or fittest becomes subjective, and reliance on the method of inference as the sole guide becomes questionable. Also difficult to overcome in such a circuitous situation are the problems of operationalisation and measurement. In fact, these issues, which can neither be eliminated nor avoided, open the way for judgment and consensus to play a role.

Tentative theories (hypotheses) lead to final theories through confirmation/verification or refutations. However, efforts to date have failed to produce rules by which the relative degrees of confirmation of competing hypotheses might be established (Caldwell 1980). The attempts to avoid Type I error (committed when a true null Hypothesis $[H_0]$ is rejected) and Type II error (committed when a false null hypothesis $[H_0]$ is not rejected) in statistical tests provide only a very conservative criterion of both.

Another important question involves the relationship of theory and its use (action). Since the P/E scholars’ mission is to understand reality and truth, they tend to evaluate theories in terms of their truth content although no defensible method for doing so has yet been found (Peter 1983). Usefulness of theories, which is a more pragmatic criterion, is ignored. An important way of evaluating a theory is to see how effectively it enables its user to accomplish certain task. If the application of the theory enables a marketing person to reduce the total cost of operations, the theory would be considered as useful in that particular situational context.

The notion that reality exists and it is to be discovered is the objective reality. Philosophers such as Hume, Locke, and Berkeley argued that the process of discovery is a perceptual process; and that all formulations of existence of a thing might be in terms of ideas which derive from experience. Thus the world around us must be a world of ideas and not of independent essences (Turner 1967). The reality, which has to be created, must be subjective. It does not need to be discovered. In other words, reality is relative and context-specific; science is rational, subjective and a social process that creates many realities. Hence theories cannot be universal; they are meaningful only within their contexts. However, the R/C scholars acknowledge the usefulness of theories as a criterion for evaluation of its effectiveness rather than an end product; but suggest that science has no independent method for evaluating the closeness of theories to reality (Peter 1992).

All these imply that the very premise of the P/E science is wrong and thus appear to be totally irreconcilable with the R/C ideas. Figure 2 presents a diagrammatic outline of the R/C view of science. It is worth noting that over the last two decades, positivism has been modified to a large extent, if
Figure 2
Relativist/Constructivist View of Scientific Method

Relativist/Constructivist Premise

- Science is subjective, rational to the degree that it seeks to improve individual and societal well-being; and depends on social/cultural/political/economic and other dimensions.
- Scientific knowledge is contextually and temporally relative; and the process by which theories are created, justified and diffused throughout a research community needed to understand science.
- There may be many ways of doing science validly that are appropriate in different situations.
- Nothing can be measured without changing it.

Legend:
- Scientific Method
- Influence
- Boundary
not completely abandoned by the philosophy and sociology of science.

**SCIENTIFIC METHOD AND MARKETING SCHOLARS**

For over the last thirty years, marketing scholars have looked to the philosophy of science for guidance in this area. Apparently, they also have been divided in two distinct camps. The first camp includes Hunt (1976a), Brodbeck (1982) and others who advocate the perpetuation of modern logical empiricism. On the other hand, the second camp consists of scholars such as Zaltman, LeMasters and Heffring (1982), Anderson (1983), and Peter and Olson (1983), who subscribe to the relativistic approach for the study and practice of marketing. Marketing literature, however, shows that the empiricists' point of view dominates the field of current marketing research. The emphasis on experimentation, representative sampling and inferential statistics in marketing research exemplify this point. It is worth noting that similar situation existed (and still exists) in hard sciences for a long time with good results, and as such, this observation should not be viewed as an indictment of the discipline. The empiricist approach used in the classical PIMS (Profit Impact of Marketing Strategies) studies concluded that there is a positive linear relationship between market share and ROI (Buzzell, Gale, and Sultan 1975). This relationship led to its generalization to a universal statement which has been widely used in the area of Business Policy and Strategy. However, this generalization is not a precise law of strategy like a law of physical science. History of science fails to provide any evidence to support that any universal law has ever been advanced by using a strict P/E approach (Feyenbrand 1975; Munever 1981). In marketing, even simple strategic planning models are found to be restricted to particular situations (see Day 1977); they are not universal.

Marketing researchers' major emphasis has, so far, been on designing research to test ideas borrowed from other disciplines (e.g., see Leong 1985:32-33). Replication rather than creation and development of new ideas related to marketing phenomena and problems has been the focus. The interdisciplinary nature of marketing has resulted in borrowing theories from other disciplines. Although this phenomenon has generally enriched the field, at times, the borrowings were indiscriminate or opportunistic (Murray et al. 1995). Such a practice has also contributed to marginalism (see Hornik 1982) and resulted in trivial and mundane findings (Arndt 1985). This is one of the strongest points which the R/C scholars cite in presenting their case. Replicability is a mere technical definition of objectivity that does in no way assure the scientifi city of the knowledge generated (Anderson 1983). On the other hand, "adopting a R/C approach in marketing could produce more creative and useful theories" (Peter and Olson 1983:123) and as such, "a relativist stance appears to be the only viable solution to the problem of scientific method" (Anderson 1983:25). A discipline cannot grow and attain maturity through replication alone; it requires originality of thinking. For a discipline such as marketing, the rigid empiricism cannot lead to that goal.

However, concrete proof of relativist claim seems like a mixed effort, since providing such a proof is not possible for a relativist. One reason could be the nature of R/C prescriptions about research methodology which is conceptually stimulating but difficult to understand and operationalize. The doctrine of relativism is varied and complicated in terms of its application (Muney and Fisk 1987). Most of the R/C proponents (e.g., Anderson 1983; Olson 1983) present only a scant discussion of the philosophy without bringing out all its possible ramifications which are important for the doctrine's application in the field of marketing. For example, Anderson's relativism is "critical relativism" (Anderson 1986, 1988) and is different from Doppelt's (1978) "moderate relativism". In a critical analysis of the applicability of different relativistic thinking in marketing, Hunt (1990:8) accused that "critical relativism" confuses the short-run, tangible, realizable objectives of a societal institution with its long-run aims, regulative ideals, or mission. In a more recent paper (1993), he discussed the impossibility of achieving objectivity in marketing.

**Lessons From Deliberations on Scientific Methodology**

Several points emerge from the foregoing discussions. First, and the most important point is that there exists no unique scientific method and it is futile to look for one. Other than being critical in isolating variables, careful in making observations and cautious in drawing conclusions, it is hard to say exactly what scientific method comprises. This contention leads us to the second point relating scientific methodology and identification of demarcation criteria to distinguish science from non-science. Since for science the identification of a unique methodology is a necessary condition, the search for such criteria also appears to be a vain exercise. Thus, Hunt's intersubjectivity certification cannot be supported: the scientific status of marketing cannot at all be determined with what was presumed to be a good criterion of demarcation.

Other conclusions include a criticism about the fragility of each of these two schools of thought regarding theory justification. The former group's reliance on empirical testing as the sole means of theory justification cannot be supported as it is too rigid and fragmented. Certitude (i.e., that the phenomenon is real) and complete objectivity, two commonly believed criteria of science, are not necessarily true. Also, the instrumentalist view seems to have an austere air of self denial about the notion itself. The use of theory to obtain a successful co-ordination of observations may not be considered as a prima facie proof of the theory. Evidence in favor of a theory is not a
proof of the truth of the theory itself (Oldroyd 1986:368). On the other hand, viewing the relativistic stand as the panacea is also not justifiable as it is vague and requires further elaboration for its adoption in the discipline of marketing. However, an important contribution of this school of thought is that it makes it possible to recognize certain issues of which the researcher must be aware.

The P/E vs. R/C debate has helped in providing a new direction in the pursuit of marketing knowledge by forcing marketing researchers to rethink not only about the scientifi city of marketing, but also about its meaning in the context of marketing. In fact, many scholars (Madsen 1974; Anderson 1983) preferred to shun the generally held idealized view of science discussed earlier because such a science did never exist nor would ever exist (Anderson 1983). Calling this science, Anderson (1983) redefines science as science, having its base on societal consensus: science is whatever society chooses to call science. When society views the knowledge generated by a discipline as valuable and beneficial for the society as a whole, it confers scientific status on that discipline. This science may provide an answer to the halfcentury old question “Is marketing science?” or would it ever attain that “science” status. During the last two decades, marketing has contributed its knowledge toward social causes (Sheth and Wright 1974; Levy and Zaltman 1975; Fox and Kotler 1980; Fine 1981) as well as to non-profit organizations (Shapiro 1973; Kotler 1975; 1979; Rothschild 1981).

Consumer researchers are increasingly being consulted by public policy officials. In addition, marketing has also begun to experience “reverse borrowing” especially in the method areas such as, multivariate analysis and survey research (Anderson 1983:27). The creativity and innovativeness seen in the current marketing literature shows that as a discipline marketing has gone way beyond much dependence on other disciplines. These signs are indicative of marketing’s achievement of scientific status.

**Objectives of Marketing and Making Marketing More Effective**

Does it really matter whether marketing is science? Is it not more important to know the objectives of marketing and the ways to achieve them? Peter and Olson (1983:124) rightly contend that “we should be concerned to make our discipline more effective in creating useful knowledge about our subject matter”. However, the term useful knowledge does not have an unanimous interpretation since it begs questions such as, useful to whom; when; in what way, and how should the usefulness be determined. There is no denying that like many other social sciences, marketing is way behind the so-called pure sciences in terms of both quantity and quality of scientific information, no matter how it is defined. Bridging the gap is important though not easy. It is apparent that in their attempt to bridge this gap in the past four and half decades, many marketing scholars have become more involved and, to some extent, obsessed with the means rather than the end: in the least, the end has been misunderstood. Amorphous definitions of key concepts such as useful knowledge, may have contributed towards this misunderstanding. While it is important to note that reaching desired ends without giving due consideration to means is not possible, progress of marketing demands a more balanced focus on both ends and means.

There are many examples to prove that scientists’ search for basic knowledge in the pure sciences without any idea of possible application during the conduct of the search has resulted in useful products in the future. Hence, the term useful knowledge requires a broader definition to include both present and potential future usefulness. If marketing wishes to progress by creating “useful knowledge” -- which should be its primary focus (and to mature to attain a scientific status, which is, at best, a secondary goal) -- it has to be more pragmatic and forward looking. This would require pursuit of knowledge irrespective of whether it has immediate usefulness or not -- because it is beneficial for society as a whole and for the various constituencies of marketing discipline in particular; and because it can contribute toward the furtherance of existing knowledge and can have potential future use. Also, pursuit of knowledge is intellectually stimulating and as such, inherently interesting. Anderson’s (1983) suggestion to move away from the traditional concepts of ideal science and to look for the science that has its basis on societal consensus has no basic conflict with the suggestion made above. It does not necessarily negate researchers to accumulate basic knowledge that is not currently useful, but may turn out to be useful in the future in ways that can not be imagined now. The new interpretation of science coupled with the broadened meaning and achievements of the marketing discipline have already started to enrich the knowledge base of the scholars in the field by helping them to determine the focus of the subject and how to achieve it. A more encompassing meaning of useful knowledge will further enhance the march of the discipline.

**THEORY DEVELOPMENT: ACADEMIC VS PRACTITIONER ORIENTATION**

Researchers have viewed marketing as an applied area concerned largely with the improvement of managerial practice. Parasuraman (1982:78) noted that “the raison d’être for any marketing theory is its potential application in marketing practice”. Traditionally, marketing has been a discipline in which the pragmatic contribution of any investigative effort is the primary basis on which its worth is evaluated (Alderson 1957; Cunningham and Enis 1983). During the 60s and early 70s, the marketing discipline was enriched by a growing body of literature related to theory,
methods and models. Management Science and Consumer Behavior were introduced, which gradually became parts of the marketing discipline. As far as the direction and accomplishment in developing knowledge was concerned, marketing discipline had become self reflective by the late 70s. However, research in the field had relatively little impact on improving marketing management practice (Myers, Massey and Geyser 1980:280). Monieson (1981) linked this application problem to the difference of views of reality held by academics and practitioners.

An Emerging Gap

It is, indeed, sad to note that although much research in marketing remains fragmented and scattered (Sheth 1967; Jacoby 1978), and the present stage of theory development in marketing is far from mature, several marketing scholars have documented an emerging gap between the academic researchers and practitioners of marketing (Holbert 1974, 1976; Kover 1976; Geyser 1978). In the academia dominated world of theory development, much of the credit for the advancement of theories in marketing is generally attributed to the academics and researchers. There is a tendency to downgrade the efforts of the marketing practitioners who are viewed as mere users of these theories; and not contributors to their development. This view is grossly erroneous, since practitioners have also developed theories themselves. Although both the academic researchers and practitioners claim to pursue knowledge following scientific methods; academic researchers tend to view the practitioners' observation base for theory development to be narrow, limited and biased. They are accused of sacrificing rigor in the name of relevance, and tailoring to satisfy the criteria of a good theory. On the other hand, the practitioners accuse the academics of being too subjective and non-pragmatic.

The issues of theory development and theory use refer not only to the general difference between the viewpoints of academics and practitioners of marketing, they also reflect a rift within the academic community itself. For example, Ryan and O'Shaughnessy (1980) consider it essential to clearly draw the line between theory- and practice-oriented research. Holbrook (1985:146) accused practice oriented researchers of being anti-intellectual whereas Jacoby (1985:160) believed that such an approach is useful as it can enhance our understanding of the marketing discipline by providing useful information.

Practitioners Approach to Theory Development

While the academic research orientation may be characterized as concept-driven design; the practitioner research orientation, on the other hand, may be viewed as system-driven observation. In the former approach, the researcher first selects elements and relations from a conceptual domain; determines the methodology(ies) to construct a design and finally implements that design on some system of his/her choice. In the latter method, the practitioner selects the elements and relations to be studied from some existing system, chooses the methodology(ies) to develop observations; and finally moves to the conceptual domain to interpret that set of observations. In both approaches knowledge is pursued using similar steps in a different sequence— what the academic researchers do first, practitioners prefer to do last (Brinberg and Hirschman 1986:170).

One must, however, recognize that in the pursuit of knowledge, the practitioner also faces issues and problems similar to those that confront the academic researcher (scientist). For the manager, the reality to be studied is the perceived reality of some existing system which may or may not be representative of the true system or reality -- only those elements and relations that are perceived to be useful in a particular context are selected by the researcher. Hence, the observations may be biased and fragmented. More often than not, the practitioner ends up conducting relationship studies attempting to determine the relationship between dependent and independent variables rather than linking the results to an established research program or a body of theory. However, his/her conceptual domain may be influenced by some pre-conceived notion or theory, or by some previous experiences which in turn influence his/her explanation. Thus, the manager actually creates a contextual reality rather than discovering the true reality whatever that may be. His/her view(s) of the system in question and selection of pertinent elements, and relations depicting the system could significantly differ from those of another practitioner. These phenomenon also contributed towards the gap.

A practitioner is affected by a need to act while an academic is not. This creates some motivational problems. In a given research orientation, a practitioner spends resources in developing, articulating and finally solving a problem. The set of concepts selected to explain a phenomenon is often least attended to because the focus is basically on the problem, and because no one set of concepts is likely to explain the problem in its true dimensions. But in an academic research orientation, generally the greatest amount of resources are spent in developing a detailed articulation of concepts, and the phenomenon is least attended to because it is selected simply to illustrate relations among concepts (Brinberg and Hirschman 1986:171).

The differences between the two approaches are also reflected in their respective reward-seeking behavior. While the academic researchers are not necessarily consensus seeking, the practitioners, to a large extent, are. Coming up with findings contradictory to the existing belief does not necessarily put an academic researcher in a position of emotional discomfort: the researcher may feel elated for being able to contribute something new to the existing knowledge.
base. But a manager is consensus seeking and finds comfort when the findings conform to existing base of knowledge.

Marketing practitioners generally make use of conventional marketing research tools and techniques. The standard tools and techniques of marketing are seldom used by practicing managers (McDonald 1990). Tendencies or preferences in the way they conduct research or favor certain methods and explanations largely predetermine which they see and find. For the sake of being objective they tend to rely heavily on raw sense data ignoring unconscious experiences. Furthermore, they adapt their problems to the techniques rather than doing it in the other way round which is likely to predetermine their research findings. Also, their lack of expertise with a particular method, tool or technique may result in findings which may not be valid (Alford 1986).

NEED FOR RESOLUTION

Almost a decade ago, Leong (1985:8) asserted that the resolution of the debate concerning the scientificity of marketing “is essential for future progress in marketing because the adoption of a particular philosophical perspective affects what facts, theories and methodologies will subsequently be acceptable to the discipline”. Noting that “the time seems ripe for some form of a Hegelian dialectical synthesis between the apparently polar extremes presented by the logical empiricist thesis and the relativist antithesis” (p.1), he presented a modified version of the Sophisticated Method of Falsification (SMF) in support of his stand. By incorporating the notion of middle range theories (Merton 1957) in a Lakatosian research program which is "intermediate to the minor working hypotheses evolved in abundance during the day to day routines of research, and the all inclusive speculations comprising a master conceptual scheme" (pp. 5-6), he illustrated the structure of the information processing research program in marketing. Similar synthesizing techniques may be thought of as possible ways of resolving the problem in other contexts as well provided they take note of two factors that limit viewing marketing as a science. These are: (i) marketing is an applied field, and (ii) marketing attempts to explain human behaviour which is unpredictable, reactive and mutable (Zinkhan and Hirschheim 1992). Organizational science ought to be structured so that a moving equilibrium between changeability and stability can be obtained.

The P/E and R/C approaches need not be regarded as opposing methodologies. The two schools of thought can be viewed as a complementary set of ideas. A fusion of the two may not be easy, but not impossible: one can be incorporated into and blended with the other. For example, Lutz (1982:12) visualized a “contingency model” with a particular approach to science being useful in one context but not in others. Olson (1982:14) believed that the different approaches may be applicable for different levels of analysis. Since there is no unique and sure method of acquiring scientific knowledge, ideas, hunches, concepts and hypotheses can be drawn in any manner — rigorous or otherwise. This anarchistic component within its structure will enable science to progress all the better. However, it does in no way imply that certain carefully controlled procedures have no relevance. There is a constant fruitful union in science between disciplined and undisciplined elements. While positivists such as Comte emphasized the ordered disciplined aspect, epistemological anarchist Feyerabend would possibly have done it in the opposite manner. Also needs to be resolved is the academic - practitioner debate regarding theory development exemplified by the display of negative attitude to the research orientation of one group by the other (Philips, and Tybout 1981; Berkowitz and Donnerstein 1982; Calder,) since it is not conducive for the development of marketing discipline. The debate need not and should not turn into a conflict. There is no denying that theory development must be linked to, and not separated from, theory use. A research project that includes a set of concepts and methods without application to a focal point is incomplete. In the same vein, if a researcher observes a phenomenon but fails to explain it because a set of concept was not developed, the project would also be incomplete. In this connection, it is also important to note that the rigor-relevance dichotomy characterizing the academic and practitioner research respectively in marketing is not only false and essentially misleading, but also counterproductive. Good research in marketing must have both. Since concern for rigor alone could lead to mis-specification of marketing problems, consideration for relevance becomes important (Webster 1988).

Case for a Metamethodology

Viewing science as science$_2$ rather than science$_1$ and synthesizing the two opposing philosophies does not automatically solve the methodological problems in the creation and/or dissemination of knowledge. Methodological issues are of particular importance because it is through methodologies that knowledge is pursued, generated and evaluated for study and practice. In marketing, less attention has been given to methodology at a meta-level (Sauer, Nighswonger and Zaltman 1982). Research methodologies have largely been influenced by the metatheoretical biases of the researchers and methodological singularism has been advocated. Empiricists’ reliance on inductive statistics (see Anderson 1983), structural modeling equations (Bagozzi 1984) or qualitative methods (Deshpande 1983) exemplify this point.

Methodological singularism of any kind has the tendency to force all problems into the molds of one or two routine techniques, insufficient thought being given to the relevance of
the assumptions implied by the imposed method (Box 1976:79). Adoption of methodological pluralism would help to overcome this problem. However, this should not be construed as an acceptance of Feyerabend's doctrine of "anything goes" that tends to suggest maintaining an inventory of research techniques for the sake of variety. Only contextually relevant ones are to be considered.

The two basic methodological objectives in marketing research – (i) to subject theories to test, and (ii) to apply those research methods which have the greatest problem solving efficacy – cannot be compromised as it would be an antithesis to marketing's development and growth. It is necessary to have an in-depth evaluation of the assumptions, limitations and adaptability of the research methods employable in the specific context. Reviews of several quantitative models such as canonical correlation (Lambert and Durand 1975), cluster analysis (Punjhouser 1983; Punj and Stewart 1983), conjoint analysis (Green and Srinivasan 1978), discriminant analysis (Craske and Peraul 1977), factor analysis (Stewart 1981), multidiimensional scaling (Malhotra 1987; Sibson 1979), repeated measures analysis (LaTour and Mniad 1983), stepwise multiple regression (McIntyre et al. 1983), structural equations modeling (Bagozzi 1980; Bagozzi and Yoon 1988; Fornell 1983) and the widely used statistical testing methods (Leong 1985; Sawyer and Peter 1983); and also in-depth examination of qualitative methods (Van Mannen, Dabbs and Faulkner 1982) are good attempts to accomplish the second objective listed above. These reviews also bring out how different techniques may be appropriately applied and thereby, provide useful cautionary signals to the marketing researchers.

Methodological pluralism is a systematic selection of context-, situation- and use-specific methodology(ies) in a research process that would meet the two objectives listed above. The following example cited by Brinberg and Hirschman (1986) involving a researcher interested in the general area of information processing, illustrates the workability of such an approach in real life situations. The researcher uses a set of concepts (attitudes, beliefs, salience) and a set of methods to study those concepts (e.g., semantic differential scales, reaction time, open ended elicitations, functional measurement methodology) and then applies the combination of concepts and methods to a specific problem (e.g., choosing a product, giving a gift, voting for a candidate).

**IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING**

There is no denying that the quality and usefulness of marketing theory will depend on how definitions, assumptions, and hypotheses are combined. Researchers and practitioners in marketing must remember that as a discipline, marketing is accountable for the present, responsible for the future (Baker 1986) and must learn from the past. The implications of the lessons learnt from the deliberations presented earlier are profound and substantial as these can guide and motivate the marketing scholars of the future. Notwithstanding what has been, and is being done in the field of marketing now, following observations are of particular interest for its future development.

- It is inappropriate to look for one unique method for the development and evaluation of marketing theory.
- The scientificity of marketing cannot at all be determined by using the so called scientific method as a criterion of demarcation.
- Despite its popularity, marketing scholars' reliance on empirical testing as the only means of theory justification may not be appropriate for the progress of marketing discipline.
- Marketing scholars would benefit from looking at other approaches as alternative methods for doing marketing. However, a proper understanding is a prerequisite for that.
- There is a need for more academic-practitioner interaction to further marketing knowledge.

It is not surprising that the new paradigm researchers have found mainstream marketing theory wanting. Working from various metatheoretical assumptions, these researchers offer alternatives to the dominant, old paradigm. Some of them are abandoning efforts to answer questions such as how advertising works. Instead, following the lead of the new social science, they are studying historically situated, contextualized action (Battle 1994). A recent study (Howard et al. 1991) suggests that many marketing academics prefer that marketing theorists focus on a specific dimension of theory or area of study rather than attempt to develop a comprehensive marketing theory.

At a time when there is an increasing emphasis on the globalization of marketing efforts all over the world, leading marketing scholars across Atlantic seem to have some fundamental attitudinal differences concerning marketing theories. While the American academics tend to view marketing theory as something that belongs in the classroom under the control of academics for academics, their European counterparts seem to see marketing theory as something helpful to practitioners in the real world (Howard et al. 1991). Such cross-national attitudinal bias may not be helpful for the growth of the discipline.

In many ways, marketing as a discipline has failed to communicate very well with its various constituencies. While in some groups (e.g. academia) intra-group communication vehicles are available for the dissemination of marketing knowledge, in other groups (e.g., practitioners) its availability...
is limited for reasons such as confidentiality, competition, lack of interest etc. There is a lack of inter-group communication as far as dissemination of knowledge is concerned. Over time, barriers to widespread dissemination of marketing knowledge has evolved, and to some extent, have become institutionalized so that they not only prevent communication efforts, but also hinder the development of marketing knowledge (AMA Task Force Report 1988). Bridging this ever widening gap is necessary for the overall advancement of marketing knowledge, its scope, study and practice.

Several approaches may be considered useful in this respect. For example, practitioners can be meaningfully involved in the theory or model development process (Parsuraman and Day 1977, Wilson and Ghandour 1980). Research on marketing may give special attention to the use of multiple orientations (Brinberg and Hirschman 1986; Brinberg and McGrath 1985). Academic researchers must change their negative attitude towards practitioners' works and efforts. Involvement of academics and practitioners in marketing seminars, forums and colloquiums may be useful for the dissemination of knowledge. These avenues may serve as common grounds for the academics and practitioners to interact, exchange ideas and earn from each other by seeking clarifications of issues, concepts, and methodologies pertaining to the study and practice of marketing.

Academics and practitioners are the two most important shapers of marketing knowledge. They must not look at each other as adversaries: in a sense they are complimentary to each other. After all, what kind of knowledge is marketing if it is not relevant for the practice of the discipline. Unlike the job facing engineers who apply the theory of hard sciences such as physics and chemistry to solve practical problems, marketers have no theory base from which to draw. Hence the task facing marketers, of necessity, demand that they pursue both basic as well as applied research in order to making marketing a successful discipline. Almost four and a half decades ago, Revzan (1951) commented that “analysis leading to theory should not merely condone practice, but should seek rather to improve and direct such practice”. Unless the gaps between various orientations regarding theory development and conducting research are bridged, both the study and practice of marketing would suffer.

REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

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