

Research and Education: Marketing in the Future

Geoffrey Kiel

**Professor of Management
Graduate School of Management
The University of Queensland**

In "Marketing in the Future", Michael Baker challenges us to think about the future in marketing. He reminds us of the nature of change and the difficulties of forecasting the future. The paper is a useful summary of some trends evident in the global economy and provides insight into some of the skills which we shall require to manage in this new environment. Michael Baker's paper is particularly apposite in questioning what marketing and management practices will be required in the twenty-first Century.

In this paper I would like to pose a related, but distinct, question – what is the future of the academic marketing discipline? The coming change to the next millennium provides a unique opportunity for marketing academics to take stock of our discipline – what and how we research, our paradigms, theories and models and our role in the academy of scholars.

In summary, I shall present critiques of the marketing discipline as being more of an ideology than a social science; that the discipline lacks truly alternative paradigms; that the discipline is too firmly entrenched in the positivist epistemological tradition and, finally, that the discipline suffers from North American ethnocentrism. This paper suggests that an answer to some of these problems of the discipline lies in the development of a philosophy of the marketing discipline. The paper also encourages expanding the areas of marketing behaviour that are researched and the practice of marketing and consumption in other cultures.

Such a review of our discipline is warranted. Consider the following rebuke of the marketing discipline by Alvesson and Willmott (1996, p.119), writing from a critical theory perspective:

Marketing is perhaps the most visible and controversial of the management specialisms. Its academic status is also rather precarious. Brown (1993: p.28), for example, talks about 'marketing's perennial search for academic respectability' and of 'the discipline's lowly standing in the scholarly caste system.' More salient are the widely expressed doubts about its contribution to the social good of society. However, debates about the credibility and social contribution of marketing have tended to take place outside, or at least at the margins of, the marketing specialism. Indeed, it is probably fair to say that, of the management specialisms, marketing has been one of the least self-reflective and, seemingly, the most self-satisfied. As a discipline, marketing is generally at a low level of theory development (Arndt, 1980, 1985) in which the question of whether it has scientific status has been periodically raised – but then only, it would seem, to

argue for a positive answer, and thereby legitimise the claims of the discipline (Hunt, 1976).

While there are many aspects of the marketing discipline which can be criticised and which are inherent in this rebuke, the following four criticisms are fundamental to understanding the current dilemma facing the marketing discipline.

1. Is the marketing discipline an ideology rather than a social science?

Much of our literature has the hallmarks of ideology rather than a social science. An ideology can be defined as "a body of ideas held by a group that contains values relating to political action and the distribution of public goods", (Webb, 1995, p.66). Webb puts the view that significant differences exist between social science and ideology. Social science disciplines move into ideology when the scientists attempt to promote a particular view of the world as being a policy issue to be followed. In doing so, the social scientist moves away from "social science as a purveyor of a multitude of rich insights and interpretations of the social world", (Webb, 1995, p.77).

One can observe in the literature of the marketing discipline a relatively naïve assumption that meeting customer needs and customer satisfaction will produce a better society. Much of the research orientation of the discipline is oriented towards advising managers how to better market their product or service, with an outcome of improving customer satisfaction and certainty with an objective of profit. Indeed, this is the very basis of the so called marketing concept (Borch, 1957; Payne, 1988).

Making the assertion that the marketing discipline has many of the traits of an ideology rather than a social science should not be confused with the view that science, or at least social science, should be value free. Values are an inherent component of human life which are invariably interwoven into the research methodologies and findings of social scientists.¹ Mature social sciences recognise the value basis of competing paradigms and build these value structures into the inter-paradigm debate. Ideology, on the other hand, promotes a persuasive view of the world, exhorting groups to adopt the values and follow the practices proposed by ideologically based group. Many aspects of marketing teaching and research can be found with such an ideological – such as the

marketing concept, marketing management theory and, indeed, some writers on relationship marketing.

Ideology is not, in itself, bad. The world requires leaders to advocate points of view. This includes marketing academics developing a literature and discourse on how to market as one dimension of their role. However, for a true social science of marketing to emerge, the discipline needs to move itself above ideological perspectives to foster alternative paradigms and theories.

The contrast between positive and normative theory is a related issue to ideology. Hunt (1991) makes the distinction between positive theories – “systematically related sets of statements, including some law like generalizations, that are empirically testable and that increase scientific understanding through the explanation and prediction of phenomena” (p.189) and normative theories which refer “to some kind of model which assists the decision maker in rationally or systematically choosing among a limited set of alternative actions or strategies, given certain (1) objectives; (2) consequences or pay off; and (3) states of nature” (p.189). It can be argued that the vast majority of marketing textbooks and a significant amount of academic research in marketing is of a normative rather than a positive approach. While, as previously noted, most disciplines have an applied focus, it can be argued that the academic discipline of marketing has placed far too much weight on normative theory, consequently inhibiting the growth of the discipline.

2. Why is there a lack of alternative paradigms in the marketing discipline?

The marketing discipline has largely adopted one paradigm, the transactional based marketing management paradigm. This paradigm has been pervasive in the marketing textbooks, the design of marketing degrees and in the marketing literature. More recently, the relationship marketing paradigm has been developed as a possible alternative to the marketing management paradigm (Grantors (1993) and Jitter and Whirl (1994)). Contrast this situation with the wide variety of paradigms found in other social science disciplines such as economics, psychology and sociology. Is this lack of paradigm diversity a function of the narrow scope of the area of interest of the marketing discipline or is it a result of the discipline's almost universal focus on providing

ideological advice rather than understandings of the relationships of the marketing world?

3. Why has the academic marketing discipline remained firmly entrenched in the positivist epistemological tradition?

The academic marketing discipline, probably alone among the social science disciplines, has remained largely in the positivist tradition with respect to how we research and understand the marketing world. Many other social science disciplines have long ago either abandoned positivism or relegated it to one of a series of alternative epistemological paradigms capable of being used to develop theories and models to understand our social world. Indeed, it somewhat ironic that the academic discipline of marketing has been so firmly wedded to positivism, indeed, taking a strong position on logical empiricism or its successor, modern empiricism (Muncie and Fiasco, 1987) when the body of marketing practitioners has been such a significant user of one form of qualitative research, primarily focus groups. On the academic side, when reviewing major journals such as the *Journal of Marketing Research*, you cannot be but surprised at the overwhelming number of articles based upon this one epistemological approach to marketing. Alternative approaches such as Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) are rare and controversial exceptions.

4. Is marketing a predominantly North American discipline?

There is significant evidence which points to the almost total capture of the major journals within the marketing discipline by North American academics (Hoffman and Holbrook, 1993; Leong, 1989; Page and Mohr, 1995; Cote, Leong and Cote, 1991). From a sociology of science perspective, it can be argued that the ownership and editorial boards of the major marketing journals, such as the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing research*, *Journal of Consumer Research* and *Marketing Science* are firmly in the control North American academics who are narrow in both their view of the marketing discipline and methodologies to explore its myriad dimensions. This capture has led to the study of predominantly North American markets and marketing issues and the maintenance of modern empiricism as the epistemology of choice. In short, there is a significant North American ethnocentrism evident within the discipline.

If marketing is to emerge as a full social sciences discipline in the next millennium, these issues must be of concern to current marketing academicians. This theme is also echoed in the commentary of James Hulbert's article in this edition of the journal. As Hulbert notes, the problems of the academic discipline of marketing are becoming well discussed and understood – it is their solution which provides the difficulty.

DEVELOPING A PHILOSOPHY OF THE MARKETING DISCIPLINE

As a starting point, I would encourage the continued development of the philosophy of the marketing discipline. I have deliberately used the word *discipline* rather than *science* as used by Shelby Hunt who writes about "the philosophy of marketing science" (Hunt, 1991). The word *science* in itself has connotations that restrict our viewpoint. This can be seen in Hunt's work and his definition of positive theories given earlier in this paper with the emphasis on such theories being empirically testable. Hunt argues from a scientific viewpoint (Hunt, 1990) which in itself is highly contestable (Peter, 1992).

What do we mean by a philosophy of the marketing discipline? A departure point is with the concept of philosophy itself. While the discipline of philosophy is highly contested ground, we can begin with the definition provided by the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Blackburn, 1996).

Philosophy (Gk., love of knowledge or wisdom) the study of the most general and abstract features of the world and categories with which we think: mind, matter, reason, proof, truth, etc. In philosophy, the concepts with which we approach the world themselves become the topic of enquiry. A philosophy of a discipline such as history, physics or law seeks not so much to solve historical, physical or legal questions, as to study the concepts that structure such thinking and to lay bare their foundations and presuppositions. In this sense philosophy is what happens when a practice becomes self-conscious.

A philosophy of the marketing discipline should be concerned with the basic issues concerning marketing. These will include the boundaries of the marketing discipline, the different viewpoints as to why we wish to understand marketing, the uses to which such understandings are put, the basis of our understanding of marketing, the ethical questions raised by the study of the

discipline, the role of values and ideology in shaping the discipline, the role of alternative methodologies and so on. It is interesting that with some notable exceptions (Hunt, 1983, 1991), Arndt (1985) and Carmen, (1980) that the discipline itself has encouraged little discussion on the nature of the philosophy of the discipline.

Fortunately, the discipline of philosophy is well trodden, if highly contentious territory². Two major areas of the mainstream discipline of philosophy are epistemology and metaphysics. Any philosophy of the marketing discipline must discuss the epistemology of marketing. We can also conjecture as to whether there is a metaphysics of the marketing discipline. These themes are briefly expanded below.

The epistemological questions are concerned with the nature of knowledge and our right to the beliefs that we have – in short, how we know what we know. A key focus of epistemology is the methodological question – how should researchers in the marketing discipline go about describing the world in which we live? For example, following Guba and Lincoln (1994), it is possible to talk about four major alternative enquiry paradigms: positivism, post positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Positivism refers to the outcome of the long tradition of empiricism within philosophy and logical empiricism discussed and discarded by philosophers earlier this century, but still a mainstay of much methodology in the marketing discipline. Guba and Lincoln describe post positivism as "represent(ing) efforts of the past few decades to respond a limited way, (that is, while remaining within essentially the same set of basic beliefs) to the most problematic criticisms of positivism" (pp.108-9).

Critical theory involves a collection of methodological approaches such as Marxism, feminism, materialism and participatory enquiry.³ These approaches come together in critical theory and post modernism. The common framework of these critical theories is the assumption that all knowledge is value determined, that is, one cannot distinguish between the knowledge and the enquirer. Constructivism differs from critical theory in that it is based upon the philosophical principle of relativism – that is, that knowledge can only be understood within the relation to the social background of the perceiver. These alternative epistemological approaches raise significant and often heated debate in other disciplines.

Unfortunately, the marketing discipline has been largely bereft of any such debate. This is not to say that discussions of basic epistemological questions are new to

the marketing discipline. The discipline has seen some debate in the *Journal of Marketing* concerning philosophical issues regarding social science epistemology. (See, for example, Hunt 1976; Anderson, 1983; Deshpande, 1983; Hunt, 1983; Arndt, 1985; Peter and Olsen, 1983; Leong, 1985; Hunt, 1990; Peter, 1992). Unfortunately, this debate has not significantly touched the mainstream research agenda of the discipline. In the marketing discipline we seem to categorise discussion on epistemology as an interesting sub-category, unrelated to the mainstream conduct of the discipline.

A second branch of philosophy is metaphysics. Whether there is a metaphysics of the marketing discipline is an interesting question in its own right. Metaphysics "is concerned with any enquiry that raises questions about reality that lie beyond or behind those capable of being tackled by the methods of science. Naturally, an immediately contested issue is whether there are any such questions..." (Blackburn, 1996, p.240). Metaphysics is concerned with the basis of concepts fundamental to the marketing discipline such as causation. Much research in the marketing discipline is concerned with establishing causal relationships, such as the causal links between marketing management tools such as the 4Ps and consumer response or between the marketing strategy environment and marketing management behaviours. The metaphysics of marketing causation explores issues such as whether causation in marketing is deterministic (event *a* has a probability of one of causing event *b*) or probabilistic (event *a* has a probability of *x* of causing event *b* where $x < 1$).

Another area of metaphysics relevant to the marketing discipline is the area of ontology. Ontology is concerned with the form and nature of reality. For a marketer, questions of ontology go to the very hub of the discipline. For example, some of the central concepts used in marketing and subject to debates are ideas such as the product/service dichotomy, the consumer/industrial marketing dichotomy and so on. Are these real or, rather, convenient classifications primarily relevant to western economies in the late twentieth century?

It is not the role of this paper to explore these major issues in any major detail – there is a plethora of works within the broad discipline of philosophy itself and, more specifically, related to the social sciences (for example, Webb, 1995; Burrell, 1996; and Marsden and Townley, 1996). Rather, the role of marketing academicians should be to fuel the to-date sporadic debate concerning these issues and their application and usefulness in the discipline of marketing into a roaring fire of discussion.

Such a debate will not be neat, ordered or passive. Indeed, there are those who will feel that such discussions will lead nowhere and provide no further development of marketing as an academic discipline. The other view, which I support, is that such debate will lead to a healthier and more robust academic discipline.

EXPANDING THE DOMAIN OF RESEARCH

As well as increasing discussion on the philosophy of the marketing discipline, the discipline, in order to progress into the future, needs to quickly broaden its area of research. One dimension would be the types of markets and market relationships that are seen in the world. For example, little is published on commodity marketing (Kiel, 1997). Negotiation is central to many marketing situations and an academic literature has developed in the area of negotiation. Yet much of this literature lies outside the marketing discipline. Where also is the marketing literature on competitive tendering? Many industries rely significantly on competitive tendering approaches – yet within the mainstream marketing discipline, this is a little discussed phenomena. In short, there are many areas within the exchange definition of marketing where theorising and research is required. The discipline must obtain greater balance in its theory and research between consumer and industrial markets.

A second dimension where marketing needs to expand for the twenty-first century is understanding markets and exchange processes outside the North American and European communities. The discipline must move away from a preoccupation with advising western managers to a full understanding of other cultures and the consumption processes within this. There are some signs within the discipline that these trends are emerging.

CONCLUSION

Finally, I can hear many of you asking "Is this what our students want?" Don't our students want to be educated in current marketing practice so they can obtain marketing jobs? How will such a development of the marketing discipline fit within a university system which seems increasingly focused on the main role of universities to be one of vocational training?

As Michael Baker's article so well draws to our attention, markets and marketing are changing dramatically and are likely to continue to change significantly over the next few decades. The half-life of marketing knowledge as currently taught is probably about five years. While not denying that a key role of marketing education must be to

equip students with an understanding of and skills in current marketing processes and practices, our overarching task as marketing academicians must be to teach our students the tools and techniques of thinking within a marketing context. It is only equipped with these tools and techniques that we can expect them to creatively adapt to the changes that the next millennium will bring. Such thinking will be built upon the bedrock of a philosophy of the marketing discipline. Such thinking will encompass more than marketing management practices and consumption behaviour in a North American context – it will cover marketing and consumption behaviour across all kinds of markets and all cultures. This is the future of research and education in marketing in the 21st century.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 A further criticism of the marketing discipline is that it is probably one of the last bastions of the social sciences where there is at least an implicit assumption by many of its academic practitioners that its research is value free.
- 2 For an interesting and readable review of the history of the development of philosophical thought, see Jostein Gaarder's (1996) *Sophie's World*.
- 3 See Brown (1993, 1995) and Firat and Venkatesh (1996) for some introductory incursions of post modernism into marketing.

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