

CHAPTER 1

MARKETING STUDIES: THE CRITICAL STANDPOINT

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 introduces the rationale and approach of the book. The chapter outlines some penetrating criticisms which have been levelled at Marketing practice and Marketing studies. The chapter goes on to examine the critical standpoint in Marketing studies and offers a simplifying typology of critique with examples of how this typology might play out in terms of some of the general and specific criticisms of the managerial Marketing approach. This typology is revisited throughout the book.

Introduction

As a critical introduction to Marketing studies, this book assumes that readers already have a working knowledge of the applied management principles, the 'tools and concepts', of Marketing. Taking these as a starting point, it develops lines of argument which critique those tools and concepts and the various assumptions which underpin them. The intention is to set the typical Marketing studies topics within a more rounded intellectual, historical and institutional context than is found in mainstream books and courses. The book is written for students, academics, researchers and practitioners to offer a resource for a deeper sense of intellectual engagement with Marketing which includes but also goes beyond the applied, managerial perspective.

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The critical tone of this book will jar with many students of Marketing more used to the very upbeat, positive and affirmative tone of typical textbooks on the subject. Professor Philip Kotler's (still) original *Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, Implementation and Control* (1967) epitomizes the normative managerial Marketing approach with which so many thousands of students are familiar. The reach of Kotler's Marketing management approach (and its many imitators) has been such that many students of the subject already possess a working knowledge of its conceptual vocabulary of consumer orientation, segmentation, positioning and targeting even before they begin their formal studies.

Marketing studies have become so closely identified with a technical enterprise of managerial problem solving that criticism can hardly penetrate the glossy veneer covering its mass-market textbooks. Wealth and value creation are the espoused values of managerial Marketing. What can there be to criticize about a set of techniques designed to make organizations work more effectively for managers, shareholders, customers and society? The Marketing concept of customer orientation, its techniques of market research and product development and its persuasive targeting, branding, retailing and advertising approaches are typically deployed in an uncritical managerial agenda which promotes organizational effectiveness above all else. But the vacuum of critique in the discipline has serious personal, educational, civil and environmental implications. There is a striking need, therefore, for a thoroughgoing critical stance as an intellectual and moral counterpoint to the managerial problem-solving style of Marketing studies and the values which sustain it. Indeed, there is a need for an organic Marketing studies to balance the heavily processed, chemically constituted managerial Marketing brand.

The idea of critique can mean very different things in different contexts. Marketing studies is typically conceived as an applied management field in which critique does not normally extend beyond functional evaluation of its problem-solving techniques. Marketing, many popular textbooks claim, is a 'critical' organizational function. By this, they do not mean that it is intellectually rigorous, but merely that it is important. It is hard to deny that Marketing is important, to wealth distribution, economic growth, employment and industrial competitiveness. It is a collection of activities, processes and practices with wide-ranging organizational, economic and social implications. But a critical focus which falls narrowly on the technical efficiency of Marketing is hardly adequate because it does not examine the ways in which ideas are constructed and sustained and the forms of social and economic organization they support. This book, then, takes Marketing studies, as it is typically understood as a managerial discipline, as a relatively critique-free zone which would benefit from a radical reappraisal.

Criticisms of Marketing are, by implication, criticisms of the role of Marketing studies in management education and training. There are resonant calls for Marketing practice to serve the world better, for example,

by developing more environmentally friendly products and services; by using resources more effectively and efficiently; by working for sustainable and socially positive forms of consumption; and by generally incorporating a stronger sense of ethics and social responsibility within the theories, the practice and the educational programmes of Marketing. Within the Marketing field, there is a crisis of confidence as regards the power of its ideas to influence markets and fulfil the strategic objectives of organizations, while Marketing academics wonder whether their theories and research really engage in the right way with any of the key audiences for Marketing studies: practitioners, students, employers, citizens and society in general. So, even the most vocationally inclined student of Marketing, lacking even a shred of intellectual curiosity, will benefit from an appreciation of critical perspectives in the subject, if only so that he or she can engage with the kinds of criticism inevitably faced by professional Marketers with suitably adroit sophistry. For those with a more detached curiosity about the world, an engagement with critical Marketing studies can be a surprising and fascinating adventure.

Criticizing Marketing: where to begin?

The tone of many Marketing textbooks (Brown, 1995; Hackley, 2003a) implicitly signals to students that criticism is outside the boundaries of Marketing studies. The style of writing in many such books casts Marketing as an ideology to be accepted, or rejected, uncritically. So criticizing aspects of the subject will seem unsettling for some students used only to the conventional style of Marketing text. But the edifice of Marketing studies does not collapse if it is subject to criticism. Instead, possibilities for a new Marketing studies emerge. So, disorientating as it may be for students of managerial Marketing, it is probably best to dive straight in at the deep end. A frank encounter with some of the main criticisms of managerial Marketing studies might feel like a cold shower of disillusionment to some, given that framed Marketing degree certificates take pride of place on so many living room walls. But it isn't the subject itself which is being criticized, nor is it the ability or sincerity of its students or teachers. Rather, it is the values which have come to frame the way Marketing studies is popularly conceived which attract such vehement criticism.

General Criticisms of Marketing Studies

Given the level of acceptance Marketing concepts and Marketing studies have achieved globally, it may come as a surprise to many students of the subject that, for many of its critics, it simply has no features which redeem its fatal ethical, practical and intellectual shortcomings. The ways

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the subject is typically conceived, practised and taught have been roundly criticized for, among many other things:

- a perceived lack of real intellectual engagement with other disciplines
- a lack of response to criticisms of practising managers that Marketing does not deliver
- an over-emphasis on narrow managerial priorities and consumer self-interest
- complicity in environmental issues such as waste and destruction of resources
- a lack of theory development as a result of a misguided model of practice
- a tendency to cling uncritically to outdated concepts of limited value
- an overriding focus on transactions and profit rather than relationships and value
- intellectual shallowness, emphasizing naive instrumentalism over critical reflexivity
- a lack of moderation and a tendency to universalize North American neo-liberal values
- an over-emphasis on quantitative modelling in a positive-empiricist social science

(see Alvesson, 1994; Brownlie et al., 1999; Burton, 2001, 2005; Crane, 2000; Cova, 2005; Jack, 2008; Klein, 2000; Tadajewski, 2006a; Witkowski, 2005; and Dholakia et al., 1980, in Tadajewski and Brownlie, 2008; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Gronroos, 1994; Gummesson, 2002a; Hastings and Haywood, 1994; Sheth and Sisodia, 2005).

Arguments over the declining role of critical thinking and the dumbing-down influence of positivistic learning objectives go on in all university subjects. No teaching subjects are immune to the commercial and ideological forces facing universities, and all entertain deep intellectual divisions and impassioned debates. In many subjects, these debates are largely invisible to students on mainstream courses. Criticisms such as those above reflect sincere debates within the field. They are not dissimilar to the kinds of argument which go on in other fields of management, social and human studies, and they should be taken seriously if we are to understand why they arise, what they mean and what response is appropriate.

Criticisms of Marketing do not end with nice intellectual distinctions about the most appropriate sources of theory or research methods. There are widespread perceptions that the business function of Marketing simply does not deliver on its claims. Sheth and Sisodia (2005) write in the academic's top Marketing journal, the *Journal of Marketing (JM)*, that:

Marketing effectiveness is down. Marketing is intrusive. Productivity is down. People resent Marketing. Marketing has no seat at the table at

board level and top management. Academics aren't relevant. And we have an ethical and moral crisis. Other than that, we're in good shape. (p. 10)

A thoroughgoing critical Marketing studies must, then, acknowledge not only the ethical and intellectual criticisms levelled at the subject and also the charge that it is guilty, at best, of political naivety, but must also take on board the admission of the field's top research journal that Marketing falls considerably short of its claims as a management technique.

Depressingly, Marketing and business management academics get little credit for acknowledging the weaknesses in their discipline and are seen by the unsympathetic as no more than corporate ideologists. In fact, some Marketing academics are quite indifferent to such a label and see no need for critique at all. This indifference, though, invites serious criticism from outside the discipline. For many critics, Marketing studies is a field of science which can demonstrate no progress, a field of social science which does not engage with social issues, and a field of human study which, reduced to technical problem solving, is thoroughly dehumanized. A critical appreciation of Marketing studies needs to engage with these criticisms to understand why they arise and to evaluate their fairness.

Scott (2007) (herself an internationally eminent Marketing academic) expresses the widely held view that Marketing is a part of a relatively 'homogenous and uncritical' management and business enterprise which attracts the undisguised contempt of academicians outside business and management because of its 'ostrich-like' intellectual blindness which renders it incapable of meeting 'the challenges of either practice or ethics' because 'it so totally lacks critical perspective'. Scott (2007) goes on to say that 'regardless of the level of scientific rigour that may be flaunted, the determination of business schools to be the unquestioning handmaids of industry make them a laughing stock at the campus level of most universities' (p. 7).

Such severe criticism might seem unfair, even perverse. It is, at least, a serious charge given the resources devoted to Marketing education, the importance of management education to the economy and to wider society and the amount of time and money invested in Marketing courses by thousands of individuals. Many Marketing academics feel that criticisms such as these are indeed unfair. They argue that its scholarship enjoys a rich and varied connection with the statistical and social sciences and the humanities, even if this breadth of influence is seldom evident in typical taught courses or textbooks. Most Marketing and management academics feel that they are academics first, and management academics second. They feel that intellectual values guide their teaching and research. Clearly, management subjects have an applied character too. But management academics feel that a direct connection with worlds of practice can be intellectually enabling.

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If they have failed in communicating or preserving these values, there is a case to answer.

Specific Criticisms of Marketing Studies

So much for general criticisms of Marketing studies. These are comprehensive enough, and will be elaborated upon throughout the book, but will seem very abstract to many students of Marketing management. An outline of some more specific criticisms of managerial Marketing's concepts might provide a more concrete point of departure for a critical Marketing studies. Once the more direct criticisms of Marketing's functionality as a management technique have been outlined, it is possible to ask deeper questions about why, if these criticisms have any grounds, the discipline has not evolved new theories to challenge or replace the olds ones.

Does the Marketing Concept Work?

Whether the Marketing concept deserves to be taken seriously as a management maxim is a big question which deserves a lengthier treatment than it is given here. Suffice to say that the way the concept is generalized into a one-size fits all panacea for organizational problems in popular text-books is regarded with no little scepticism in some quarters (Brown, 1995; Wensley, 1988; 2007). According to Ted Levitt's influential article, 'Marketing myopia' (1960), organizations flourish by finding out what customers want and then giving it to them. This is the essence of the Marketing concept, which holds that Marketing is not merely an organizational function concerned with sales and customer service but is no less than a philosophy of business (Drucker, 1954) which, in the Marketing oriented organization, should permeate every department. Organizations which focus on production, cost efficiency or sales will, ultimately, fail, according to Levitt's (1960) vision of Marketing orientation. The customer-focused and market-oriented organization will succeed. Kotler (1967) averred that this managerial concept can be put into action through a sequence of market analysis, strategic planning, implementation and control. Market success can, on this model, be directed by skilled Marketing managers armed with the right market information, primed with the right strategy and operationalized with the right Marketing techniques.

All of which will sound very familiar to people even superficially acquainted with managerial Marketing. The Marketing concept of organizational success through customer focus and market orientation is rather too general to prove or to refute. And this is one criticism levelled at it. It simply doesn't amount to anything more than folklore, at least according to its detractors. But, to take it seriously as a heuristic or 'rule of thumb' for management action, it seems to imply a rather static business model. Conventional Marketing's most persistent credibility problem lies in the evidence that significant numbers of business success stories seem to owe

little or nothing to Marketing's key precepts. On the face of it, some highly successful organizations which claim to be customer-focused treat customers badly on occasions and don't necessarily base their activities on detailed market analysis. Instead, their success seems to be founded on a customer value proposition which people find attractive. The organization then exploits all the market power it can to push that offer into the market.

The point that the classic Marketing concept does not seem to fit many organizational successes has been made forcefully by many commentators. Brown, for example, (2001a, 2003, 2005b, 2006a, 2007) has argued forcibly that teasing, rather than satisfying, customers has been the key for some global Marketing successes, including the Harry Potter phenomenon and Ryanair, not to mention unconventional Marketing geniuses like P. T. Barnum and 'Colonel' Tom Parker. Some of the typical examples of Marketing success cited in mainstream textbooks (MacDonald's, Avis, Reader's Digest, Microsoft, Ford, etc.) are open to the charge that Marketing textbooks depend on them more than their success depended on Marketing textbooks. Entrepreneurial flair, imagination, drive and leadership might explain those iconic brands rather better than the Marketing concept. Counter examples might include Microsoft, the now-ancient history lesson in innovation leadership of the Sony Walkman, and more recent developments in internet business models. YouTube.com, for example, built up huge volumes of customer traffic by giving away its service free. Subsequently, Google paid a vast sum for its advertising potential. In effect, Google was buying a customer base from a provider that didn't sell any products. That is a business model which would seem highly improbable, were it not for the fact that YouTube was sold for some \$6.5 billion in 2006.

It could be argued that these examples of business successes did not, on the face of it, seem to owe anything to the classic Marketing concept. More specific criticisms have been made of the managerial efficacy, and also the evidence base and logical coherence, of other well-established Marketing concepts such as the Product Life Cycle or PLC (Hooley, 1994); segmentation (see, for example, Saunders, 1993; Wensley, 1995), and the Four Ps of the Marketing Mix (Brownlie and Saren, 1992), to mention just a few examples. Other scholars have argued that the classic Marketing concept has an outdated focus on transactions, products and tangible resources, and that there needs to be a turn in the post-industrial economic era to services which utilize intangible resources to try to build customer relationships (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; for a critique of the service-dominant logic in marketing, see Brown, 2007).

It is axiomatic in Marketing texts that the Marketing function is strategic in the broad sense that it is sometimes the result of planned activity drawing on significant resources and designed to further the goals of the entire organization, though it should be noted that the typical emphasis of managerial Marketing studies and texts on large consumer goods manufacturers has been criticized by those who feel that Marketing studies

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ought to reflect more closely the fact that the vast majority of business enterprises are small ones (Carson, 1993; Carson et al., 1995). Nevertheless, Marketing and the heavy hitting management discipline of strategy are often thought to fit together hand in glove (e.g. Hooley et al., 2008) even though they are sometimes located in different organizational departments, and often in different academic departments. Every textbook on Marketing principles or Marketing management has a chapter (or several) devoted to strategic Marketing planning. Yet the strategic planning element of many commercial successes is as difficult to see as the presence of the Marketing concept.

The commercial insight of visionary entrepreneurs such as Ray Croc, Akio Morita, Bill Gates, Richard Branson and Henry Ford, to take a few examples¹, apparently owed little to formal, textbook models of strategic Marketing planning. Of course, there is a danger here of conflating different things. Entrepreneurship, innovation, leadership and marketing are not the same, yet they seem to be closely connected.² Marketing, for many, is a word that evinces creativity, innovation and intuition, even if its managerial prescriptions fail comprehensively to explain radical innovations and creative leaps forward in commerce and administration (Cova and Svanfeldt, 1992). Yet the strategic planning approach within which Marketing is usually located is associated with rationality and bureaucracy. Planning formulation and planning implementation, though, can be seen as two distinct processes (Mintzberg, 1994) that are not necessarily connected. There are many tales of organizational life in which elaborately and expensively devised strategic planning documents are created at great cost in time and expense, then put in desk drawers, never to be read again, as people go back to operating in their usual interactional, intuitive and political way³.

Peters and Waterman (1982) created a case-based deconstruction of pretensions of strategic planning, but the notion that market success can be formalized in written documents and executed with a high degree of control persists. This does not, of course, mean that there is no value in pursuing such ideas in management and Marketing education and research. The important point to make here is that typical Marketing texts and courses seldom acknowledge or engage with criticisms of the functionality, evidence base or logical coherence of the main concepts of the subject. In particular, the Marketing concept seems to treat the organization as a blank canvas for the execution of Marketing ideas. Organizations are profoundly complex, human institutions (Watson, 2001a, 2001b), and managerial Marketing texts and courses completely ignore the institutional dynamics which have to be negotiated in order for the Marketing concept to be enacted.

It is already clear, then, that the charge that Marketing precepts don't work in practice is more complex than it appears. If they do not, why is that? Is it because they were not based on sound evidence? Is

it because they lack intellectual robustness? And, in any case, by what standards can organizational effectiveness in Marketing be judged? Are there not many other possible explanations for organizational failure? Does the fault for the failure of new products, lack of innovation, falling demand, loss of market share or other organizational ills have to lie with Marketing management ideas? Or can it be blamed on the human error of the managers, deficiencies of staff training, quality management or resourcing, or simply the infinite uncontrollable variables in the marketplace? Looking beyond practice at Marketing studies and management education, is it fair or appropriate to judge Marketing ideas by social scientific standards? And if not, why not? If they should be, then do Marketing theories stand up to critical social scientific examination? And what, for that matter, is a theory?

So, not only is criticism of Marketing difficult to categorize and balance; each criticism implies deeper ones. Ultimately, a critical Marketing studies has to move beyond naive and ultimately insoluble considerations of organizational relevance and effectiveness to engage with issues of ethics, values, intellectual standards and the sociologies of knowledge and practice.

Consumer Behaviour Models

Continuing this brief outline of points which criticize managerial Marketing studies on its own terms, on grounds of effectiveness, relevance and practicality, the model of the consumer upon which Marketing activity is predicated has come under close and continuing scrutiny. It seems clear that the anthropology, psychology and sociology of consumption are central to Marketing studies. Above all else, Marketing's claims are based on a privileged understanding of consumers, their wants, needs and inner drives and aspirations. The market is the consumer, and knowledge of the market drives Marketing management. It has been argued that the 'black box' models of consumer behaviour derived from Howard and Sheth (1968) offer only a partial representation of the consumer, and one which, in its emphasis on consumer rationality, flies in the face of anthropological accounts of consumer motivations (Levy, 1959). Even if the consumer can be understood by Marketing managers, can consumers really be managed (Gabriel and Lang, 2006) or is the entire edifice of Marketing management based on managerial vanity and pretension? Is managerial Marketing studies based on an overblown claim about the power of managers to control the idiosyncratic, accidental and paradoxical world of consumer Marketing? Indeed, is power the elephant in the Marketing room the key issue underpinning organizational life and market processes? And if so, in what ways can managerial Marketing studies engage with this issue?

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Perhaps the Marketing texts imply a degree of control over the destiny of their brands which is simply not available to Marketing managers. Holt (2004) has suggested that the Marketing managers behind iconic brands are riding a cultural wave which they can neither control nor predict. In other words, customers and situations can be exploited, perhaps even anticipated with luck, but not controlled. That there is planning, strategy, segmentation, targeting and a sense of what consumers want behind organizational Marketing practice can hardly be denied. But exactly what these activities mean, how they play out in different organizational settings and precisely what their role is in Marketing processes may not necessarily be captured by the typical models and concepts of the managerial Marketing studies curriculum.

To be sure, Marketing is but one element of organizational success among many non-Marketing components. They include effective supply chain management, ownership of intellectual property rights or of raw materials, competitive scale and efficient manufacturing processes, creative and astute design and technology, among others. All these impinge on the Marketing offer while practical Marketing management usually focuses on issues closer to consumers like customer service delivery, pricing, promotion, distribution, product development and merchandising. So perhaps it is a little vague to say that Marketing 'doesn't work'. Nonetheless, Marketing is the discipline that has set itself up as the defining feature of organizational success, so it cannot be said to be behind all success yet at the same time not responsible for all failure.

The preceding paragraphs have opened up some questions about the functionality of Marketing concepts. These will be returned to in the book but serve, for the present, to introduce a few criticisms of Marketing studies which students familiar with the managerial style of the subject might be able to relate to. It is important to recognize, though, that criticisms of managerial Marketing's functionality are only one aspect of critique in the field. A thoroughgoing critical Marketing studies has to engage not only with criticisms of its claims as a technique of management problem solving but also with deeper issues of its implied positions on ethical, intellectual and political questions.

How Can Marketing Studies Respond to Criticisms?

There are competing visions of critical Marketing studies, many of which will be discussed later in the book. What tends to confuse students is what, exactly, they are being asked to do when asked to take a critical perspective to their studies. There is vehement debate on the nature, scope and methods of Marketing studies so, naturally, ideas of what critique in the subject ought to look like differ as well. There is a colloquial aspect to critical scholarship

and practice, which we outline here, while more theoretically based notions of critique in social study are introduced as the book progresses.

This book, then, offers a discussion around the notion of critique in Marketing. It is designed to bring disparate areas of thought in the field together in a form which can be accessed by students of the subject as a starting point for their own critical thinking, however that might be conceived. 'Critical' thinking is, simply, good thinking. But this does not mean that a critical approach to Marketing studies lacks a distinctive and different character to mainstream studies. A critical intellectual position questions assumptions about facts, relationships and values and offers new ways of understanding these and their relationships with each other. Critical thinkers look at things in new, different and creative ways. Critical thinking, in any subject, carries political, ethical and intellectual values, but the absence of critical thinking does not mean that political, ethical and intellectual values are irrelevant or not present. Marketing, broadly conceived as the activities, processes and practices of markets, influences lives and values in immediate ways. Marketing matters, since it has serious and far-reaching organizational, economic, cultural, environmental, ethical and educational implications. It is too important not to be critical, and too important not to be subject to critique.

Critical scholarship


The typical use of the word 'critical' in the context of academic studies is as a symbol of higher intellectual achievement. Few students have not been implored to write essays which 'critically evaluate' a topic, 'critique' a way of thinking about something or write a 'critical' analysis of a theory or body of work. But in spite of its importance as a foundational concept to academics, there is no agreed definition of what critical thinking or writing really entails. For many students, the instruction to be 'critical' in their essay probably means 'better', 'more' or just 'I don't exactly know but I'll award marks for it'. But even if it is difficult to define explicitly, most educators sincerely feel that critical thinking is a tangible scholarly virtue which we recognize when we see it. Academics look for critical thinking in students' work because they regard it as a mark of excellence, more difficult and creative than mere 'descriptive' work. Critical thinking is demanded in any field of scholarship and involves going beyond merely repeating and applying received ideas, even if they are repeated accurately and applied correctly. It involves taking ideas and demonstrating a thorough understanding of them by comparing, evaluating and interrogating their standards of logic and evidence. So, in this sense, critical thinking is just a term to denote the higher levels of intellectual achievement, in Marketing studies or any other subject. Academics use a similar distinction when discussing students' work between 'analytical' and 'descriptive'. Critical thinking

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is analytical in the sense that it does not merely describe ideas but analyses them.

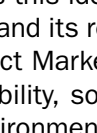
A Typology of Critique in Marketing

So much for the colloquial uses of 'critical', and the powerful but rather mystical meanings academics project onto the term. How might critical thinking, however it is designated, be applied in Marketing? Criticisms of Marketing studies persist, then, in spite of seemingly unceasing demand for its ideas in the form of management education, books and courses. But it is precisely this popularity which adds urgency to calls for Marketing studies to open up to more critical approaches. This book explores a number of lines of critical engagement in response to several persistent critical positions. Broadly, these fall into four overlapping categories, outlined here and developed throughout the book. These are labelled as functional, intellectual, ethical and, finally, political critique. This typology is used here not as a theory but simply as a literary and pedagogic device to help organize forms of critique in Marketing into more manageable subdivisions.

Put simply, functional critique asks the question: 'do Marketing techniques work as management problem-solving devices?'. Intellectual critique poses the question: 'does this idea/theory/concept make sense in terms of its internal coherence and its relation to the world it describes?'. Ethical critique asks what impact Marketing ideas and practices have on the world in terms of sustainability, social responsibility, individual freedom and other human and environmental values. Political critique asks: 'in whose interests is it to express Marketing ideas this way as opposed to a different way?'.


It is worth saying a little more about these categories of critique here.

Functional critique

The first category, examples of which have been outlined above, concerns criticisms which accept the discipline's key assumptions as a technical, managerial problem-solving enterprise but challenge the validity and efficacy of particular ideas with this approach. In other words, we can ask the question: 'do Marketing techniques work?' So Marketing studies is seen as an applied management field, and the academic role is to try to research and develop Marketing techniques to improve management training, education and practice. This inward-looking Marketing studies has two main dimensions. On the one hand, Marketing tools and concepts are evaluated in the light of evidence of how, and if, they get results in application. On the other hand, and equally importantly, they are evaluated in terms of their internal coherence and evidence base. Many criticisms in this vein imply both an evaluation of outcomes, however they might be measured, and a critical appraisal of the intellectual coherence of Marketing management prescriptions (Thomas, 1994, 1996).


For example, few Marketing textbooks do not draw on the 'AIDA' linear model of persuasive advertising adapted from the work of Strong (1925). This 85-year-old communication theory, based on personal selling, conceptualizes Marketing communication in terms of a sequence of internal states through which the receiver of the communication progresses. In order to be effective, a Marketing communication is said to have to get the Attention of the targeted receiver, then to generate Interest, promote Desire and finally persuade the receiver into Action, that is, purchase. This model has been criticized on many grounds. It is neat and simple, but some argue that it is simply wrong (Heath and Feldwick, 2008) from a practice point of view, others that it fails to capture the social character of Marketing communication (Ritson and Elliott, 1999), while still others have argued that it is such a gross simplification that it fails to teach students anything useful (Buttle, 1995). In this way, functional criticisms of Marketing management ideas overlap into evaluations of their internal coherence and evidence base.

Criticism of Marketing's practical effectiveness, its functionality, then, entails an evaluation of its key managerial principles, tools and concepts. In particular, it focuses on the challenges which unpredictable, quirky and creative human beings, and the complex social dynamics of markets and organizations, pose to the simplistic formulae of the managerial Marketing concept.

Ethical critique

So much for the question of whether particular Marketing ideas work in practice. One thing seems clear, which is that Marketing does indeed 'work', even if it may not be in the ways described in the standard textbooks. Marketing is held up as a social force for good and, often, for ill. Environmental destruction, waste of resources, over-pricing, labour exploitation, spreading values of greed and acquisitiveness – these are just a few of the crimes laid at Marketing's door. Marketing practice is subject to many criticisms of its ethics and standards of social responsibility (Hastings and Haywood, 1994; Smith, 1995), and especially the effects of Marketing activities on the vulnerable, particularly children (Nicholls and Cullen, 2006). Marketing studies has been criticized for not incorporating an ethical stance more deeply into its teaching and theorizing. Some argue that Marketing discourse and logic have spread far beyond markets and reach deeply into the everyday lives of citizens and individuals, commodifying even human relationships (Reuter and Zitzwitz, 2006). The managerial Marketing approach tends to look at organizational problems as technical difficulties of Marketing efficiency with consumers seen as the means to achieve organizational ends. So ethical critique focuses on the moral and social values implied in the activities of organizations and the implications these might have for the world and for individuals. This suggests an examination of the ethical and social values which surround Marketing practice and which are embedded

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in Marketing education, research and theory, as well as an examination of the regulations and laws which delimit Marketing activity (Hackley et al., 2008). This would include a challenge to the managerial problem-solving approach as the rationale for Marketing studies, to take account of its broader societal role. It has been argued, as Chapter 2 describes, that Marketing studies has taken a wrong turn and that, because it has forgotten its history, it has left behind the concern with the wider effects of Marketing on society which were once central to the way the Marketing discipline was conceived (Witkowski, 2005).

Intellectual critique

Marketing studies, and management and organization studies in general, are typically thought of as fields of application rather than of pure intellectual endeavour. Yet Marketing, even if it is seen as a simply managerial problem-solving discipline, has to draw on many other disciplines for insights and conceptual frameworks. The mainstream Marketing management approach to research and theory has been criticized for being highly selective in the way it draws on and uses theories from other fields of human and social science (Brown, 1995; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; O'Shaughnessy, 1997). What is more, it has to justify its place intellectually in university curricula all over the world. So, the second broad category focuses on the internal coherence, elegance and depth of Marketing theories and ideas. In part, this category of critique draws attention to criticisms of the intellectual standards of Marketing studies and challenges the intellectual basis which sustains the managerial Marketing agenda. It calls for Marketing studies and research to draw on a broader intellectual heritage to engage fully with other fields of social and cultural study and take account of historical and institutional forces which shape Marketing studies and practice. These calls have come from within the Marketing studies field as well as from other intellectual disciplines. The criticisms in this category entail an examination not only of the coherence of Marketing's managerial concepts but also of its intellectual scope and ambition as a discipline. Marketing studies can be seen as a simply managerial discipline, or more broadly as a field of social and human study based around the activities and processes of markets, consumption and the various implications of these activities for individual humans and the wider world. Marketing's theories, its assumptions, its intellectual values and its very modes of representation, the way it is written about and described in different media, are, then, subject to an examination which asks why things make sense in this way, when they could also make sense understood in a different way.

To make this more tangible, many Marketing scholars explore the outer reaches of the scope of the discipline from social scientific and humanistic perspectives. Marketing studies have not only been concerned with the

scientific analysis of markets, need satisfaction and competitive success but have also explored topics as diverse as the psychoanalysis of kleptomania (Fullerton, 2007), Nestlé's Marketing strategies in the Ottoman Empire (Köse, 2007), the inversion of the male gaze in advertising (e.g. Patterson and Elliott, 2002) and the tragic life and death of jazz legend Chet Baker (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007), not to mention the symbolic, hedonistic, existential and sexual motivations behind consumer behaviour (Elliott, 1997; Gould, 1991; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Levy, 1959) and the postcolonial undertones of the Irish pub industry (Patterson and Brown, 2007). These topics, studied from many theoretical approaches which could hardly be further removed intellectually from the typical topics of Marketing management, hint at the scope of Marketing studies which occur outside from the Managerial mainstream.

Political critique

An examination of the values of a discipline includes looking at how ideas have evolved and what institutional forces formed them and sustain them. This, in turn, implies an examination of who stands to gain and why, by making Marketing studies into one thing rather than a different thing. Marketing studies is a vast, diverse and plural field of social scientific and human study. In its 100-year history in universities, it has been characterized by perpetual tension and contest over its values, methods and scope (Marion, 2006; Wilkie and Moore, 2003). Not only is the field subject to internal tensions and political contexts over which theories and approaches are accepted as legitimate and which are not, Marketing also has a wider political dimension in the sense that it is intimately implicated in the play of power in social life. It has been argued that Marketing is essentially an ideology (Marion, 2006; Whittington and Whipp, 1992) and this implies that it confers power on those who control the way it is understood. In organizations, Marketing discourse justifies the power of managers who have control over what is seen as 'customer orientation' or appropriate levels of service. Marketing discourse, the use of Marketing ideas in everyday interaction, is used to justify many kinds of change, both organizational and social (Willmott, 1999). Since Kotler and Levy (1969) called for the Marketing management concept to be broadened to be applied in non-profit, public sector, professional service and charitable sectors as well as commercial manufacturing sector (see also Kotler and Zaltman, 1971; Kotler and Roberts, 1989), Marketing ideas have spread to become a force for the marketization of all walks of life (Reuter and Zitzwitz, 2006). To this extent, Marketing studies and Marketing practice can be seen as having a political dimension because they are concerned with the power which plays through the use of certain ideas. Typical Marketing management texts and courses tend to ignore this aspect of Marketing, treating it as a neutral, technical exercise with no social, personal or political implications.

Political critique overlaps with intellectual critique in the sense that any serious examination of ideas should involve a historical and institutional perspective. Yet, in Marketing studies, there is a good deal of intellectually sophisticated research which fails entirely to engage with the politics of the discipline. Marketing studies is big business, and of course so is Marketing. If Marketing is, crudely, about making money, Marketing studies isn't far behind in money-making ability. The Marketing education and research business recruits hundreds of thousands of paying students and thousands of paid academics. It sustains an industry of textbooks, courses and management-consulting operations. Intellectualizing about Marketing can be an empty exercise unless ideas are evaluated not only in their own terms but in terms of how they arose and what institutional forces combined so that particular ideas became accepted and others ignored. This means that a critical Marketing studies requires a historical perspective and a political focus on Marketing studies as a discourse, including a critical deconstruction of its writing, its voice and its styles of representation. Marketing is said not to merely describe but to construct consumers (Elliott, 1997; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998) and workers (Brownlie and Saren, 1997; Willmott, 1999) as well as citizens. So a politically informed critique of Marketing studies would entail the use of critical theories to analyse the social and political dynamics embedded in the deep assumptions behind typical managerial Marketing approaches to the subject (Bradshaw and Firat, 2007; Hetrick and Lozada, 1994).

These categories are the points around which the book turns. They intersect each other and many of the issues discussed henceforth could be grouped under more than one of the categories. Nevertheless, the aim of the book is to offer a tentative organizing scheme for critique in Marketing, which might assist in bringing some of the wide-ranging and disparate yet vital and passionate debates in the field within the scope of more of the thousands of students and managers who have an interest in the area.

Marketing Studies and Critique

Finally, we return to the question of why critique might be considered a virtue in Marketing studies. Marketing knowledge is itself a marketed commodity (Holbrook, 1995). But what Marketing studies is, is not widely agreed upon. What goes into a university syllabus or management training course is political and contested. Typical Marketing courses and texts mobilize the ideological influences at work in the Marketing discipline at the time (Marion, 2006), and reduce the scale and complexity of the subject into a package which fits curricula needs and bends to commercial forces. Historical and critical perspectives on the subject can be neglected or lost under the weight of political and commercial influence. It is important for students of Marketing to appreciate that the content of curricula is not the result of an outbreak of agreement and consensus, but a tentative, changeable and highly selective

compromise which masks diverging views and detailed debates. Marketing is far from unique in this, though it does have a pressing need for critical perspectives to be more visible to the average student.

All this may sound disconcerting to students who are used to Marketing knowledge being packaged and delivered in tidy bullet points with glossy colour pictures. If the academics can't agree, what hope do the students have? But in this, Marketing is no different to any other field of thought. The educational point, if we need to state it, is to encourage and enable critical thinking, so that students learn to assimilate and evaluate competing viewpoints in order to better understand the thing itself. Marketing is not merely a chaos of competing views any more than Philosophy, Psychology, Theology or History. There may be majority points of view on particular issues, and there are also significant numbers of dissenters. In particular, 'critical' thought, by implication, takes a position against the popular or received view. In its everyday usage, 'criticism' can mean simply criticizing. On the other hand, critique can also refer to the application of new viewpoints to a topic, not so much in a spirit of antagonism but rather in a spirit of intellectual vitality where taken-for-granted assumptions and truths are continually questioned and new strains of thought introduced to refresh old ideas. There might sometimes be dialogue and perhaps cross-fertilization between the competing ideas. Of course, there can also be resistance, argument, and political influence over ideas. Such is the nature of every academic subject. After all, knowledge is never neutral, it is invariably invested with power for those who define it (Foucault, 1977, 2000).

This book, then, is an introduction to some of the many critical viewpoints which can be found in Marketing. Readers inclined towards critical thinking might already be asking themselves 'Is this little book really an innocent inquiry into the intellectual standards and practical felicity of Marketing? Or does it carry implicit assumptions which reflect the values, interests and priorities not of readers, students, consumers or managers, but of the author?'. The answers to these questions are, naturally, 'yes' and 'yes'. The book's main point is that they should always be asked.

This book is intended not to prescribe an agenda for critical Marketing studies but to enrich the Marketing curriculum for students by showing ways in which spaces for dialogue, intellectual perspective and critique might be opened up on Marketing's typical subject areas. To this end, it is intended as an aid to critical thinking in Marketing with the end of assisting deeper student engagement with Marketing studies. It is aimed also at Marketing researchers and practitioners who are curious about the kinds of debate over topics, methods and priorities which occupy Marketing academics. It explores questions about why particular topics are usually conceived in this particular way and not in alternative ways. Finally, it is intended as a basis for further scholarship in Marketing to the extent that it brings together strands of debate and intellectual influences which are, for reasons which are explored in the book, excluded from typical Marketing texts and courses.

18 Marketing: A Critical Introduction

So many students, practitioners and academics find Marketing an exciting subject to study because of its many-faceted engagement with the social world, its openness to different kinds of intellectual treatment, and its connection to our personal experiences as consumers, managers, workers and citizens. It is a subject of study which is both enabled and restricted through its basis in a field of professional practice. This book is an attempt to convey something of the excitement of Marketing and consumer research and study, to pay tribute to the depth and breadth of scholarship in the field and to open up critical spaces with which students and practitioners might engage, as well as academics.

The book will explore more arguments as it progresses. For now, it might be useful to look more closely at what Marketing studies has become by examining where it came from. One, frequent criticism of typical Marketing textbooks in the managerial tradition is that they offer little in the way of historical perspective. The subject is presented as if it is timeless. The absence of historical perspective in typical Marketing books and courses makes the subject easier to teach, but produces a critical vacuum around its key concepts and silences debate around which of its 100-year history of theories should be retained and which should be abandoned. Some sense of historical perspective then should be a starting point for a critical Marketing studies.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 opened up some criticisms which have been levelled at Marketing studies and Marketing practice and contrasted these with the lack of critique in the popular managerial problem-solving approach with which the subject has become identified. It outlined a typology of critique consisting of functional, intellectual, ethical and political categories of critique which will be revisited throughout the book. To further develop the context for critique in Marketing studies, Chapter 2 will explore the origins and institutional dynamics of Marketing studies.

CHAPTER REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. The typology of critique outlined in Chapter 1 divides critical approaches to Marketing into functional, ethical, intellectual and political categories. Look at the criticisms of Marketing listed earlier in the chapter and discuss which categories each particular criticism might fall into.



2. Critically evaluate the argument that Marketing studies needs a critical dimension.
3. Take three debates in Marketing discussed in Chapter 1 and evaluate the role of critique in terms of each. What questions have been asked in each debate and what assumptions have driven those questions? What end might be achieved by these debates?
4. Consider three Marketing encounters you have recently had. They might be products (a new car or watch), services (a meal in a restaurant, a course of education) and/or experiences (a day at a theme park or a date through a dating agency). Discuss to what extent you feel your encounter conformed to classic Marketing principles. That is, were your needs as a consumer anticipated and satisfied? Or were the dynamics of the encounter more complex than that, and if so in what way?

CHAPTER CASE

Coke Zero and the Limits of Marketing Research

Coca Cola, the world's number 1 brand⁴, has found that the classic Marketing planning model sometimes runs up against unpredictable events. New products are typically pre-tested before launch using research techniques of survey research, experiments and consumer taste tests. After launch, the sales are carefully monitored. The UK *Sunday Times*⁵ reported data from market research company AC Nielsen suggesting that Coca Cola's most important new product in the UK for two decades was suffering a sales decline. Coke Zero, the sugar-free brand targeted at young men, was reported to have lost roughly 30 per cent of its take-home sales in under a month. This report evinced memories of the company's attempt to enter the UK bottled water market in 2004 with its Dasani brand. A press story revealed that the Dasani production facility was piped into the UK mains water supply. So Coke were selling bottled tap water. Coke claimed at the time that their production processes refined the water making it more pure than normal tap water, but the PR damage was done and the brand withdrawn from the UK after a reputed £7 million marketing launch. Dasani remains a popular brand elsewhere. Coca Cola is reputed to research its market with great care before launching new products, and stories such as these suggest that there is more to Marketing success than detailed pre-launch market research. It should be noted, though, that Dasani is a successful brand in the USA and Canada and, at the time of writing, the marketing press is

speculating that Coke might re-launch it (possibly under a different name) in the UK in the future. Bottled water is projected to exceed carbonated drinks sales globally so the market is important for Coke.

Case questions

1. Do these examples of Coke Zero and Dasani imply that there is a flaw in Coke's Marketing logic, or might there be other reasons behind the reported failures?
2. Is it ethical to sell bottled water? What are the long-term implications of this business for the environment?
3. How might the role of Marketing research in these two new product launches be evaluated in the light of each of the four categories of critique described in Chapter 1?

Notes

- 1 Ray Croc created the MacDonalD's empire from a small hamburger store, while Akio Morita, CEO of Sony, invented and marketed the original Walkman in spite, according to legend, of negative market research results. Consumers simply couldn't grasp the concept, but Morita was convinced they wanted the Walkman, even if they didn't know they wanted it. Bill Gates, Richard Branson and Henry Ford are, of course, widely known through their entrepreneurial achievements. Like most legendary entrepreneurs, they had no formal management education.
- 2 Research in marketing and entrepreneurship is itself an academic specialism with a journal (listed in chapter and several collected works).
- 3 'Why Strategic Planning Doesn't Work (and how to create plans that do)' by *Bryan Feller* (www.marketing.org/ArticleDetails.asp?AIId=674 – Business Marketing Association website accessed 2 September 2006).
- 4 Source: Business Week Online website – bwnt.businessweek.com/brand/2005/ – 'The Top 100 Global Brands Scoreboard', data provided by Interbrand (accessed 20 July 2006).
- 5 Coke Zero sales fall to deflate sugar-free fizz', by Mark Kleinman, *The Sunday Times*, 27 August 2006, p. 3, Business section.