

FINALLY, LET'S MODEL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

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Abstract

This paper questions the extent to which marketing as distinct from selling or advocacy has been modeled in the communications literature of marketing and consumer behavior. It states communicative implications of the marketing concept and discusses conceptual and empirical issues that are relevant to each of three stages of marketing communications. Broader disciplinary implications are also considered.

Introduction

The idea seems to be abroad that one may take an existing theoretical formulation, say from mainstream psychology, plug in something about goods/services and voilà, marketing. My objective in this paper is to question the unexamined assumption that what qualifies a study as addressing marketing communications is the mere inclusion therein of messages about buying and selling. Accordingly, I ask the question: What kinds of communication does the marketing concept implicate? In the first of the paper's three main sections, I discuss behavioral implications of the marketing concept. Then I consider, in turn, each of three stages of marketing communications. In the final section, I indicate broader disciplinary implications of taking the marketing concept seriously.

Behavioral Implications of the Marketing Concept

Marketing versus Selling

What does the following statement of the marketing concept imply about the nature of marketing communications? "Don't sell what you happen to make; make what the customer wants to buy?" Most explicitly, the statement contains information about marketing's disciplinary domain which is distinguished from selling by the interdiction: "Don't sell what you happen to make." Marketing has to do with three things: (a) decisions about production -- "make . . .", (b) naturally occurring motivation -- "what the customer wants . . .", and (c) marketplace or economic exchange -- ". . .to buy." Marketing and selling both involve exchange but differ in that marketing, as distinct from selling, embraces decisions about what shall be produced, mandating that productive decisions are guided by customer wants (see Figure 1).

Going beyond what is explicitly stated, we may consider the marketing concept's most immediate implications for the nature of marketing communications. Informational exchange

as well as the exchange of goods/services for money is implied, in fact, multi-stage informational flows -- from customer to producer (to communicate what the customer wants), from producer to customer (to communicate availability for sale of what the customer wants), from customer to producer (to communicate the extent to which customers received what they wanted), and yet more. Clearly, these informational flows have distinctly different, systematically relevant, purposes which are reflected in the terms used to designate the parties to the exchanges. Strictly speaking, the initial flow (1) is not from customers but from prospects, followed by (2) an informational flow from producer to targets in the possible presence of nontargeted prospects and nonprospects, and then (3) from targets and grievs to producers.

Influence in a Competitive Environment

If we probe a little deeper and address a simple question to the marketing concept: Why must it be this way? we shall obtain the answer: Decisions about what is produced will be made anyway. Why not have production guided by information about what people want? If we press further and ask: But why is it important to make what people want to buy? we come face to face with marketing's view of behavioral influence in a competitive environment. We shall be asked to consider: Who is more likely to succeed -- producers who try to make people buy what they "happen" to have made or their competitors who first find out what is wanted and then make it available? We shall be reminded that, lacking any form of compulsion in a free marketplace, naturally-occurring psychological processes are all that producers may rely on. Realistically, producers compete in attempting to harness human energies, which are already allocated to making certain kinds of change. The offerings a producer creates and makes available will be successful to the extent that they tap into ongoing processes that move the goods and come back for more. Strictly construed, marketing communications are planned informational flows to facilitate producers in helping users to effect changes that users want to make.

Probing still further beneath the surface, we find the marketer's implicit theory of action. Stated at its simplest, action is guided by perceived value -- an old notion, to be sure, whose profundity one learns to respect upon being charged with creating what will be perceived as valuable ("make what the customer wants . . ."). At base, the marketer's task is not to assess perceived value in objects that already exist but to identify the antecedents of perceived value so

FIGURE 1 TWO CONCEPTS OF EXCHANGE

| SELLING MODEL | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| RELATIONSHIP WITH SURPLUS | DISPOSE OF SURPLUS i.e., surplus given | CREATE SURPLUS i.e., surplus planned |
| ORIGIN OF SURPLUS | OUTSIDE SYSTEM e.g., bountiful nature | WITHIN SYSTEM e.g., produced by division of labor |
| SOCIAL FUNCTION | DISTRIBUTE OUTPUT OF PRODUCTIVE ENTERPRISE | PRODUCE/OFFER WHAT USERS WOULD MAKE FOR SELVES |
| RELATIONSHIP WITH PRODUCTIVE OUTPUT | GOODS/SERVICES TO BE SOLD | GOODS/SERVICES TO BE DESIGNED/ORDERED |
| RESOURCE ALLOCATION (WHAT TO PRODUCE) | RESPONSIBILITY OF PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT | RESPONSIBILITY OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT |
| POINT OF ENTRY FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING | POST-PRODUCTION | PRE-PRODUCTION |
| ENTREPRENEURIAL TASK | FIND BUYERS | MAKE APPROPRIATE PRODUCTIVE DECISIONS |
| DILICIT MODEL OF EXCHANGE | INTERPERSONAL e.g., swapping, bartering | INTRAROLE -- resources for changed state |
| RELEVANT DYAD | SELLER-BUYER | USER-PRODUCER |
| APPROACH TO INFLUENCE | "THIS SERVES YOUR PURPOSES." | "WHAT ARE YOUR PURPOSES?" |
| PERSUASIVE TASK | "I WANT TO SELL THIS." | "I WANT ONGOING EXCHANGES." |
| FOCUS FOR BASIC SCIENCE | INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE | CONDITIONS OF WANT-OCCURRENCE & SATISFACTION |
| BASIC DISCIPLINE(S) | BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE(S) | BEHAVIORAL, PHYSICAL, BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES |
| WASTED RESOURCES & UNSHET WANTS | IF OTHERS DON'T WANT YOUR SURPLUS | IF ERR IN ASCERTAINING/REALIZING USERS' WANTS |

(Fennell 1984)

that valuable offerings can be fashioned, produced and made available for sale. To qualify as a stage two marketing study (i.e., announcement of availability for sale), it is not enough to assess audience members' degrees of favorability to a proposed message or to bundles of attributes. Among other requirements, audience members must be characterized in terms that predict what they will perceive as valuable, a point to which I shall return.

Role of Information

Marketers' use of information to guide productive decisions brings a fresh perspective to the nature of information and it may help to make a much needed connection between informational and motivational phenomena. The marketing concept is unambiguous on the point that, before producers enter the picture, people have wants i.e., their energies are already allocated to certain pursuits and they think about, seek information relating to, and engage in action that is intended to achieve certain environmental impacts and states of their being. Society assigns to the producer the task of helping users to bring about their desired external and internal states. That marketing's particular contribution to the productive enterprise is informational traces to the kind of exchange in which the producer seeks to participate.

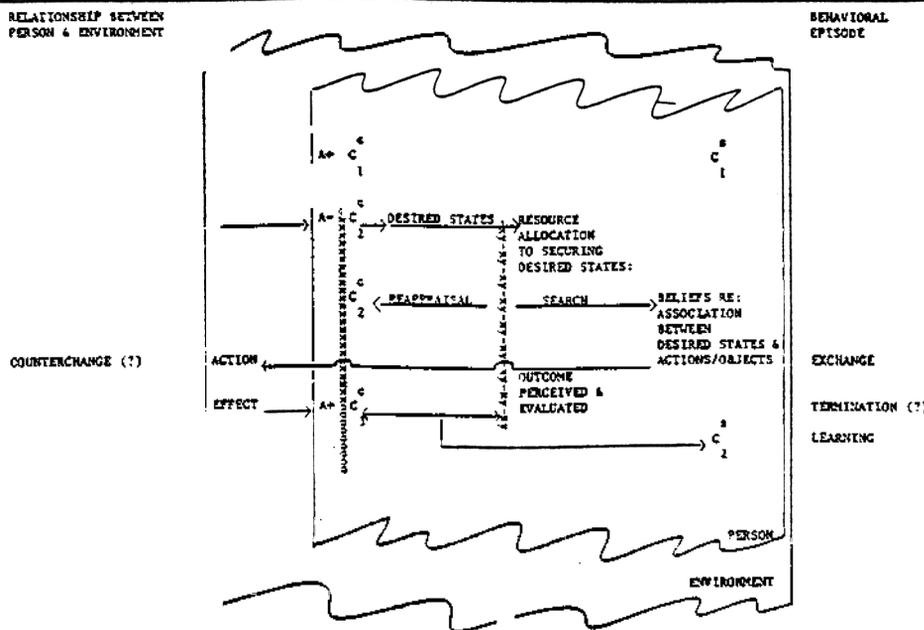
The producer wants to participate in an interrole exchange, which occurs when individuals produce for themselves change that brings about states that they desire. Quite apart from any marketplace, humans and animals, too, use their resources to bring about change. From time to time they feel uncomfortable and they do something that makes them feel comfortable again -- for example, moving into the shade out of a hot sun or strong light; brushing an ant off one's foot; when hungry, finding and eating food growing wild; when thirsty, cupping one's hand to drink water from a stream. In these cases, the individual is both user and producer, first experiencing a need for change, then selecting the appropriate change, doing what is necessary and, very possibly, achieving a desired result.

Figure 2 presents the bare essentials of this primitive interrole exchange. It depicts schematically an individual in an environment of space and time. The individual is represented by two systems only, affective (A) and cognitive (C); the current (C^c) and storage (C^s) aspects of the cognitive system are represented separately. The individual is to be considered at each of four instants of time (T₁ to T₄).

Reading down, at T₁, the individual experiences a positive or neutral affective state (A+) which, at T₂, has changed to an unpleasant state (A-) due to an intervening change in the relationship between the individual and the environment. It is immaterial here whether the change (the activating condition) affects the cognitive (C^c) or affective (A) system first. One may become aware that one is uncomfortable and search for the reason (AC order), or one may receive information which, on reflection, makes one uncomfortable (CA order). At T₂, the individual imagines a state (-xy) which lacks the unpleasant external and internal elements associated with the activating change. The individual's resources are allocated to bringing about this desired state. Thought and action are the two kinds of resources that are available to the individual. Sometimes thought alone is effective. For example, upon examination, conditions previously thought to be upsetting may be viewed as harmless. In the present case, at T₃, we are assuming that reappraisal has not been effective in restoring an acceptable affective state. Action i.e., making some environmental adjustment that counters the activating change is going to be necessary. Stored in the individual's memory is information about actions/objects that were availing in similar circumstances in the past (Beliefs), information which may permit the individual to generate one or more candidate actions/objects. We assume here that the action selected produces an environmental effect that brings about a return to an acceptable affective state (A+). However, whether or not affect remains negative following action, the cognitive storage system is different in some way at T₄, compared with T₁, minimally by virtue of registering the outcome of attempted change (C^s). The store of information for use in the future has been added to.

Figure 2 is an abbreviated version of a more comprehensive model (e.g., Fennell 1980, 1982c) in which instrumental action is represented as a means of effecting appropriate counterchanges. Out of all the things that individuals can do only a tiny fraction is appropriate to effecting any particular counterchange. Along with physical control over bodily movements, instrumental action requires the selection of appropriate aspects of the environment and movements appropriate to securing particular kinds of effects. Whether acquired through past learning or from the current environment, information guides action to effect appropriate counterchanges. If one has become uncomfortably cold due to a drop in the surrounding air temperature (activating change), it is important to know which kinds of actions/objects are likely to restore one to a comfortable state (counterchange).

FIGURE 2 THE USER-PRODUCER EXCHANGE: INTERROLE



The producer who would participate in the exchange of resources here described must provide offerings that help people make appropriate counterchanges. Once society opted for division of labor, a process of human devising is superimposed on a naturally-occurring one. Information, which in inter- exchange is the legacy of learning, must be generated in some other way. In the productive enterprise, marketing is the humanly devised link connecting change and counterchange.

The preceding analysis calls for behavioral models with features that are not commonly found in the literatures of marketing and consumer behavior, including these two: 1) We must model an individual doing something or trying to do something or wishing things were different and a producer offering to help 2) We must represent the different kinds of activating change. With regard to the first, our models must show producers receiving influence from the conditions that allocate their prospects' resources (see Figure 3). Regarding the second, elsewhere I have described activating change in terms of five simple and two complex cases (Fennell 1978): Conditions occur from which we want to escape (Current Problem); we imagine imminent conditions that we wish would not occur (Potential Problem); in many aspects of our lives, systems run down and need to be maintained (Normal Depletion); when we are otherwise at ease, some thought or occurrence engages our interest (Interest Opportunity), or desire for sensory pleasure (Sensory Pleasure Opportunity), and we feel uncomfortable until we respond further. In each case, the available actions may entail their own discomfort (Action-Related Problem) or there may be no appropriate action available (Satisfaction-Frustration). One of marketing's tasks is to translate prototypical activating conditions such as these into the specific physical and psychological terms that are relevant in the competitive context at issue.

Three Stages of Marketing Communications

In this section, I briefly discuss each of three main stages of marketing communications. Stage one has received the least attention in the marketing literature. Numerous papers address something akin to stages two and three but the approaches reflect conceptualizations and hypotheses taken over from mainstream psychology with little concern for their appropriateness to the marketing concept.

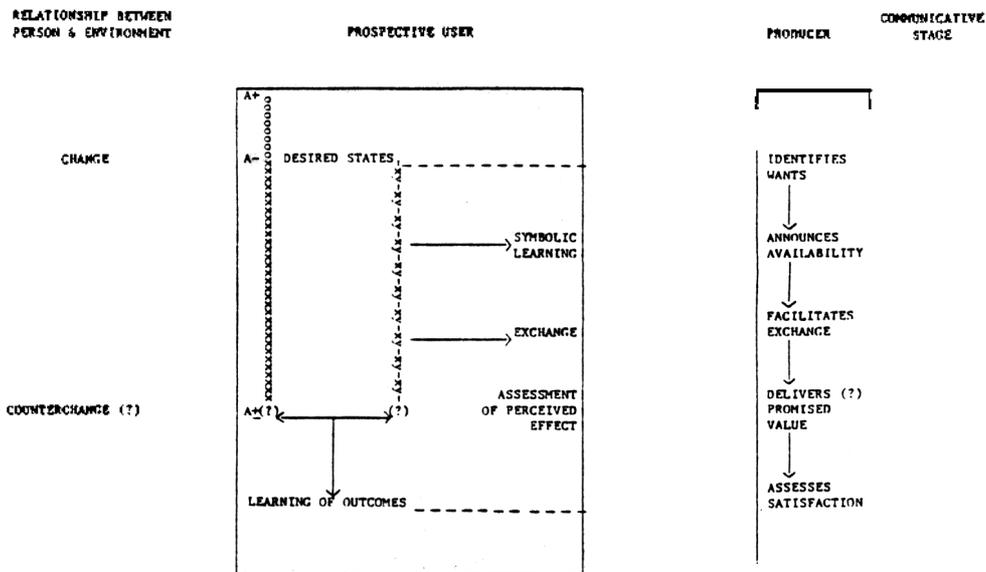
Prospect to Producer -- Want Identification.

The task of ensuring that user wants are communicated to producers is multifaceted and, in some respects, problematic. Some aspects of the task may be described as follows:
Whom to Talk to About What. { No producer is interested in

all the wants of all the people, so the question arises of identifying prospects in a naturally-occurring population. Most usually, prospects are identified as individuals who perform some activity, such as buying/using a particular kind of good/service (e.g., using dog food), or engaging in some life activity (e.g., taking care of a pet), or who own some item (e.g., pet owners). Note that an important aspect of the task of identifying prospects is stating a focal behavioral domain. There are many different ways of doing this and I have discussed the implications of some of these elsewhere (e.g., Fennell 1982a, 1982c). A prospect group initially defined as individuals who perform the focal behavior, may be further specified by excluding certain kinds of individuals (e.g., based on gender, age, geographic location, media exposure, retail outlet patronage, and a host of other considerations) or, within individuals, by excluding certain kinds of occasion for performing the focal action (e.g., following ingestion of medication, particular season of the year, while traveling). Strictly speaking, the universe that is of interest to a producer is not a universe of individuals but of person-activity occasions (Fennell 1982b), i.e., actions extended in space and time, for example, all dog feedings in the United States in a twelve month period. A troubling research issue is distinguishing those behavioral domains where there is little within-individual variation across occasions of the activity from those with high intra-individual variation. With regard to the former, respondents may be able to generalize over occasions without loss of significant information. On the other hand, with high intra-individual variation it may be advisable to identify significant kinds of use-occasions for separate study.

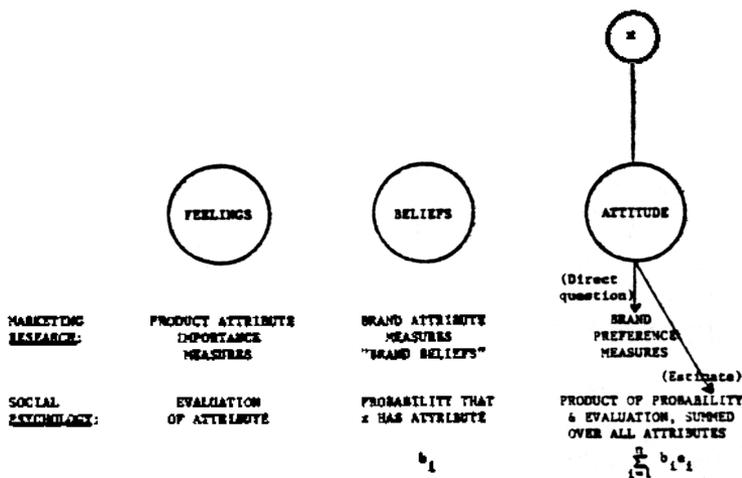
Ascertaining Wants. Elsewhere, I have discussed some of the difficulties one encounters in trying to get people to provide the information producers need in order to respond to user wants (e.g., Fennell 1982b) so my remarks here are brief. Marketing research practitioners do not, in fact, confront the problem as it is sometimes presented in marketing writing (e.g., Bennett & Cooper 1981, Hayes & Abernathy 1980, Oxenfeld & Moore 1978) namely, people are inept at describing the products they would like to see available. More usually, marketing researchers ask respondents to talk about a focal behavioral domain. Reactions to existing products and brands, and suggested modifications thereof are elicited only toward the end of the interview, which is largely devoted to exploring respondents' beliefs, feelings, desires, expectations, information, and routines in regard to activities of interest. Practitioners are likely to take the position that it is the job, not of respondents, but of marketing in conjunction with R&D to translate information about the context of use into the attributes of instrumental goods/services.

FIGURE 3 THE USER-PRODUCER EXCHANGE: ECONOMIC



text is purchase behavior in a specific product category. The attitude object, x , is represented in Figure 3, and I am asking: How are we to conceptualize what is in the space to the left?

FIGURE 3: RESEARCH OPERATIONS IN MARKETING RESEARCH AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY



It is widely held that beliefs and feelings combine in some way to produce attitude, so we can begin to fill the space with the two attitude components: Beliefs and Feelings. Let's look at the points of contact between social psychology and marketing research practice in regard to these attitude components.

In marketing research practice probably the most frequently asked survey questions relate to the components of attitude. Respondents are asked to rate a set of attributes for importance when choosing a brand in the product category under study; they are also asked to rate major brands on the same set of attributes. A direct questioning approach is usually used to obtain overall attitude toward buying a brand, and there are many different specific questions which are used for this purpose. In social psychology, there are a number of versions of what is referred to in general terms as the expectancy value approach. Probably more than any other, Fishbein's has been used in consumer psychology, and I am following Fishbein here. Beliefs are obtained by having subjects indicate the likelihood that x , the attitude object, has each of a number of attributes; feelings are obtained by asking subjects to indicate the extent to which each attribute is good or bad. The person's attitude toward the attitude object, x , is then estimated by multiplying probability and evaluation for each attribute and summing over the set of attributes (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975, p. 223). Note that both in marketing research and social psychology we cannot talk about researching Feelings and Beliefs without using one additional term: Attributes.

reason to believe that time should be spent communicating these individuals? Are the audience members taken from the general population? Are they prospects? Are they targets? "Make what the customer wants to buy" implies that when you make your availability announcement you are talking to selected individuals in the general population who, minimally, have some interest however slight in the general domain of your message. The design provides no information on the extent to which the undecided and those who indicate they probably will not buy are indifferent to XYZ in particular, or to any denture cleanser or, simply, do not wear dentures (see lower portion of Figure 4).

In contrast, a marketing paradigm is depicted in Figure 5. Across the top are depicted elements from stage one leading up to the positioning decision. The marketer starts with a particular domain of substance — the domain of the producer's expertise — which is represented here as a message domain (#1), e.g., denture hygiene. In a naturally-occurring population, individuals who perform some activity to which the message domain is likely to be relevant (focal activity e.g., denture wearing) are identified as prospects (#2). Various criteria are used in converting the universe thus defined into a market as defined (#3), within which the heterogeneous orientations to performing the focal activity are to be identified. What, in our linguistic conventions, appears to be the "same" activity e.g., brushing one's dentures, may result from different kinds of activating conditions and be directed to effecting different kinds of counterchange. Hence, the market as defined comprises various segments of demand (#4). Considerations relative to the producer's strengths and weaknesses in absolute terms, relative to competition, and as perceived by prospects lead to the selection of one or more demand segment for targeting (#5). A corresponding message is carved out of the message domain (#6).

Within the marketing paradigm, if we had a stage two objective similar to Bagozzi's (1984) i.e., to study the effect of an executional variable such as source credibility or length of television commercial, the research design would be as depicted in the lower part of Figure 5. Note that: 1) The message is systematically linked to a portion of the audience i.e., the targets. It promises something the targets are believed to value. The message may also be received by nontargeted prospects and by nonprospects; 2) Main analytic interest lies in the effect of the executional variable on message reception among targets and, within targets, among groups distinguished in terms of initial buying intentions. Minimally, the marketing paradigm requires that

researchers identify the status of audience members relative to the message domain and indicate whether the message is expected to be differentially appropriate for audience segments. My essential point is this: If researchers claim to address themselves to stage two marketing communications, then the research design must reflect the fact that the message announces availability of what some individuals in a naturally-occurring population will perceive as valuable. It must do so in a way that permits the researcher to analyze, separately, systematically significant bases for reactions to the message e.g., prima facie irrelevance of the message domain (nonprospects) or of the message (nontargeted prospects). Alternatively: What feature qualifies Bagozzi's paper as addressing marketing theory? In fact, he appears to use "marketing" and "social science" interchangeably.

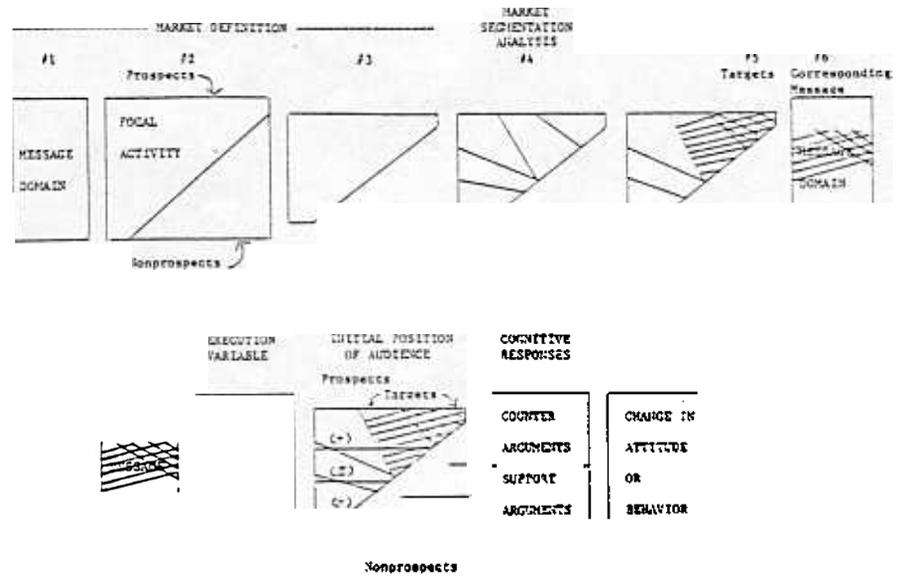
3. Targets & Triers to Producers — Satisfaction Assessment.

Marketing's task is by no means over at stage two, even if the promise of specific values has been successfully communicated to targets who have then purchased and used the good/service. The question must be answered: Has the offering delivered value as promised? Has it helped its targets to effect the counterchanges they want to make? Without a third communicative stage, producers cannot know the extent to which they have, in fact, made "what the customer wants."

Of particular interest here is the considerable body of work, conceptual and empirical, on the subject of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction (e.g., Day 1983b, Hunt 1983) to which one turns in the expectation that it may indeed be the "key to operationalizing the marketing concept" (Day 1983a). Curiously, although this work is by no means lacking in value and interest, it does not appear to be an outgrowth of the marketing concept. Explicit recognition of a connection with the marketing concept occurred surprisingly late (e.g., Day 1983a) in a decade of active research and discussion. In a nutshell, the work on what is stage three of marketing communications has progressed largely without reference to the preceding two stages. For example, can satisfaction/dissatisfaction be shown to flow from events in stages one and two? Which events? How? Quite simply, if there is customer dissatisfaction where, in the preceding stages, did failures in communications occur? Here are three respects in which this work could better reflect a marketing orientation.

Product Development and Brand Positioning. One would expect that authors interested in the topic of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction would have examined critically the work

FIGURE 5 MARKETING PARADIGM



actually done in marketing practice on the development of new products, new brands, and brand positioning generally, and be in a position to describe the state of the art in these domains with a view to identifying weaknesses of conceptualization and/or research that lead to breakdowns in prospect-producer communications. In this connection, Day's (1983a) six point program for implementing the marketing concept and my own ten point statement of the components of market definition and segmentation (Fennell 1982a, Fig.2) offer interesting points of similarity and contrast. Most puzzling, perhaps, is: 1) the absence in Day's presentation of reference to the systematic connection between his recommended six points and the routine tasks of market definition and segmentation and 2) given his special focus on stage three of marketing communications, the absence of reference to the whole domain of product development and testing prior to market launch.

Consumer Expectations. Perhaps a breakdown in stage two communications is also implicated, for example, the availability announcement may have seemed to promise values that the offering was not designed to deliver. Satisfaction/dissatisfaction as related to the confirmation/disconfirmation of consumer expectations has been the focus of increasingly sophisticated study (e.g., Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins 1983). From the perspective of the marketing concept, there is a troubling ambiguity in studying satisfaction/dissatisfaction in terms of confirmation/disconfirmation of expectations without first relating expectations to wants. In the spirit of the marketing concept, the most straightforward meaning of expectation would be the consumer's judgment: Is it offering something I want? Did it deliver something I want when I tried it, leading me to expect to find something I want next time? Construing expectation in terms directly relevant to want-satisfaction suggests, most immediately, that dissatisfaction may result from a brand: 1) Not appearing to offer what I want, 2) Appearing to offer but not delivering what I want, 3) Offering and delivering what I want but causing me bother, 4) Offering and delivering what I want but causing me harm. Analysis along these lines is relevant to the producer's task of want-satisfaction and suggests different kinds of communicative breakdown that may occur as well as different kinds of product/brand development work that may be needed.

Antecedents of Satisfaction. Perhaps the most surprising omission of all is evidence of interest in conceptualizing the premarketplace conditions that give rise to instrumental action and that, ultimately, determine the success or failure of goods/services in doing their job. Let me illustrate the point with reference to the activating conditions in my model. Each requires a somewhat different kind of productive response. Is dissatisfaction/satisfaction more often associated with one or more of the activating conditions? A brand may be positioned to respond to one, some, or all activating conditions. If positioned to respond to more than one, are some mixes, more than others, associated with dissatisfaction?

Broader Disciplinary Implications

When society opted for division of labor, to exchanges between the user and producer roles of the same individual were added the economic exchanges of the user-producer transaction. Adam Smith (1776/1961) discussed several reasons why division of labor may lead to increased output, but neglected to consider its other implications -- for one, that it makes problematic the issue of what shall be produced. With production and use now rarely in the hands of the same individual, arrangements must be made for information to flow between user and producer. When it embraced division of labor, society made marketing an essential function.

The special nature of marketing communications, grounded in marketing's societal function has not received the attention it deserves. More often than not, the contrasting advocacy paradigm occupies the limelight, frequently masquerading as marketing. Where the message comes from is not of systematic interest in advocacy. Typically, it springs from considerations that are primarily of interest to the communicator.

Certainly, it is not required, as in marketing, to spring from a preliminary flow of information from prospective audience member to the communicator. Far from harboring imperialistic designs where advocacy is concerned, I look forward to the day when its devotees will have articulated their view of its behavioral underpinnings. We shall all benefit from the development of contrasting paradigms of behavioral influence. I urge only that we resist the misguided promotion as marketing of a conceptualization that could scarcely be more alien to marketing's spirit or mandate from society. For too long, we have neglected to spell out the communicative implications of the marketing concept thus doing disservice to marketing and to behavioral science.

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