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ABSTRACT

Dholakia et al. (1987) discuss two views on marketers' proper role i.e., trying to participate in (Fennell, 1987), or change (Kotler, 1987) consumers' ongoing projects. They suggest that the two views meet if one construes "long-term benefit" as a product that consumers seek and look to the "marketing system" to provide. While marketers must strive to avoid harming consumers, for a variety of reasons discussed herein, they cannot, with integrity, claim to provide consumers' long-term benefit.

TWO KINDS OF INFLUENCE

Marketers may try to effect two kinds of influence on an individual's behavior: They may try to participate in the ongoing projects of prospective customers or to change those projects in fundamental ways. In the first instance, marketers try to adapt to conditions (in fact, some subset of conditions) that are already affecting prospects, which allocate their resources in a particular way. If they choose its formulation in light of such conditions, marketers expect that the targeted prospect will repeatedly select their offering in preference to his/her other options. In the second instance, a change agent starts with an offering whose characteristics are fixed to a significant degree, and tries to make the target adapt to that offering.

We may ask two kinds of question about such alternative forms of influence:

(1) If "participating in" or "changing" are options equally available to marketers, what are the implications of:

(a) Marketers acting as nonjudging partners who help members of society to realize their purposes whatever these may be (within law and ethics), or

(b) Marketers trying to mold such purposes in light of considerations that are significant in the marketers' eyes—ranging from what is convenient for them to produce, on the one hand to, on the other, what they consider to be in the best interests of prospective users who may think otherwise?

(2) Are "participating in" and "changing" in fact equally available as options to marketers? In particular, are they equally feasible in the competitive conditions of an open economy?

Dholakia, Firat, and Bagozzi (1987 p. 376) have drawn attention to such alternative views of marketers' role by juxtaposing the contrasting conceptions of Kotler (1987) and Fennell (1987a). Noting that Fennell distinguishes marketing from social advocacy (where successful persuasion may involve changing what the target values), they suggest that Kotler's "humanistic marketing sounds like Fennell's social advocacy":

"Humanistic marketing, according to Kotler, ought to advocate change if what is presently wanted by the consumers is to their long-term detriment."

Attempting to reconcile Kotler's view of the marketer as agent of change, with Fennell's view of the marketer as "participant in existing behaviors," Dholakia et al. (1987 p. 376) introduce the notion of long-term benefit as a "product" that consumers demand:

"A consumer demand from the marketing system in society is that such a system should research, seek, and inform consumers on the possible alternative life forms and patterns for the future as well as on the ways of achieving these alternative lives. While this is a consumer need, marketing seems to fall short most in this responsibility."

Bringing clarity to these issues is overdue. If marketing's role may be likened to that of a collaborator who participates in bringing about the lawful purposes of adult people, can it at the same time be likened to that of a guardian who screens the endeavors of a minor and, judging some detrimental to the minor's best interest, urges a change of course? We note that trying to change people "for their own good" is but one aspect of a larger topic namely, trying to change people for any purpose including for the change agent's good. Space limitations require us to restrict our comments here to what may appear to be the most favorable case for trying to change people, namely "in their own interest," or "for their own good." If we hope to move our discussion beyond the level of flag-waving, we must consider what implementing such an objective would mean in the circumstances of real world marketing.

Plan for This Paper

We ground our discussion of such questions on the fact of division of labor and the role of the marketing function as intermediary between user and producer. In order to discuss whether marketers ought to try to persuade consumers to their long-term benefit, we must have some clear idea what that might mean in the real world of individual lives and competing producers. We start, then, by reviewing the implications for marketing's role of today's arrangements for want-satisfaction, in particular (1) the distances of space and time that separate users and producers, and (2) the severed connection between output and its use that occurs when goods/services are available for purchase in readymade form, to be put to whatever use human mind may devise. Against such background, we first discuss dimensions of the task of trying to avoid harming people through making goods/services available—an obligation that is present whether one's persuasive objective is participating in or changing the target's projects. We then discuss the objective of trying to promote the long-term benefit of people through making goods/services available. Finally, we address specific issues that Dholakia et al. (1987) raise.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE USER-PRODUCER GAP

Under a system of division of labor, the work of doing the things that people do and try to do is shared between user and producer. People depend on others to produce most of what they use in the course of their daily lives. With mass production, mass media, and global markets, vast distances of space and time may separate users and producers. In significant respects, the exchange that occurs between users and producers is impersonal—clearly so, in the realm of goods, where producers may never have direct contact with prospective or actual users. Personal contact of some sort may occur in the course of delivering a service. However, the individual who provides the service may not be the effective producer of that service but rather an operative performing activities whose details are predetermined by individuals who may never meet the ultimate user.

Such implications of today's arrangements for want-satis-

faction have received less consideration than they warrant. They are far-reaching: Because the labor involved in satisfying individual wants is shared between user and producer, someone other than the user must become acquainted with the user's circumstances, then make appropriate offerings, announce, and display their availability for purchase. Such arrangements transform what once was a private transaction between user and producer into a blizzard of claims and counterclaims broadcast on public air waves, and a near-exhaustive display of the output of goods/services actually available for purchase. Moreover, all of this promotional and display activity occurs in the potential presence of individuals whose circumstances may differ from those of the targeted user, and whose reaction as a spectator may range from empathy, through bafflement, to dismay.

AVOIDING HARM, BESTOWING BENEFIT

"Marketing, in its humanistic phase, must take into consideration the long-term implications of present consumption as well as long-term benefits for consumers and society."

With these words, Dholakia et al. (1987 p. 376) move from a basic concern to avoid harming another individual (non nocere), to implying a responsibility to provide what benefits the other ("long-term benefits for consumers and society"). Although it is an easy matter to move, in one's thinking or writing, from the notion of avoiding harm to that of providing benefit, the realworld ramifications of each of these objectives are substantially different. Difficult as it can be to know for sure that one is avoiding harming another, it is yet more difficult to know what will affirmatively benefit another individual or, indeed, oneself. To lay the ground for discussing the extent to which marketers are to be held responsible for benefiting consumers in the long-term, let us first consider some of the complexities of trying to avoid harming others, in the conditions of today's mass production and mass communications.

IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF POTENTIAL HAZARD

As regards the task of identifying sources of possible harm arising from exposure to goods/services, today's arrangements for want-satisfaction have implications that go beyond the mutual obligations of the parties directly involved in the transaction. As we explain in discussing Figure 1, they include effects of coming not only in physical but also in symbolic contact with the good/service, and effects not only for targeted but also for nontargeted individuals and occasions of use. We may call this the problem of the ubiquitous marketplace (Figure 1[g]).

We must conceptualize universes of behavioral demand and of productive capability existing side by side. The behavioral domain [a] consists of all potential occasions (in some region of space, such as the US, and period of time, such as one calendar year) on which people could use a good/service. The productive domain [b] consists of the potential for making goods/services (in corresponding regions of space and time). Some portion of that potential is under the control of an individual producer [c] who identifies, within the behavioral domain, a region of demand [d] that corresponds to his/her productive capability (prospective occasions for using a kind of good/service within the producer's capability [c]). Within that domain, the producer selects some region of behavioral demand (targeted occasions [e]) where s/he believes it is possible to produce an appropriate offering [f] that will be competitive with targets' other options. The producer announces the offering's [g] availability in media selected to reach the targeted individuals [h]. Inevitably, the audience of the chosen media vehicle(s) includes nontargeted prospects [i] and nonprospects [j], as do patrons of the retail outlets where the offering may be bought. [For a fuller discussion of

FIGURE 1 ASPECTS OF THE USER-PRODUCER INTERFACE

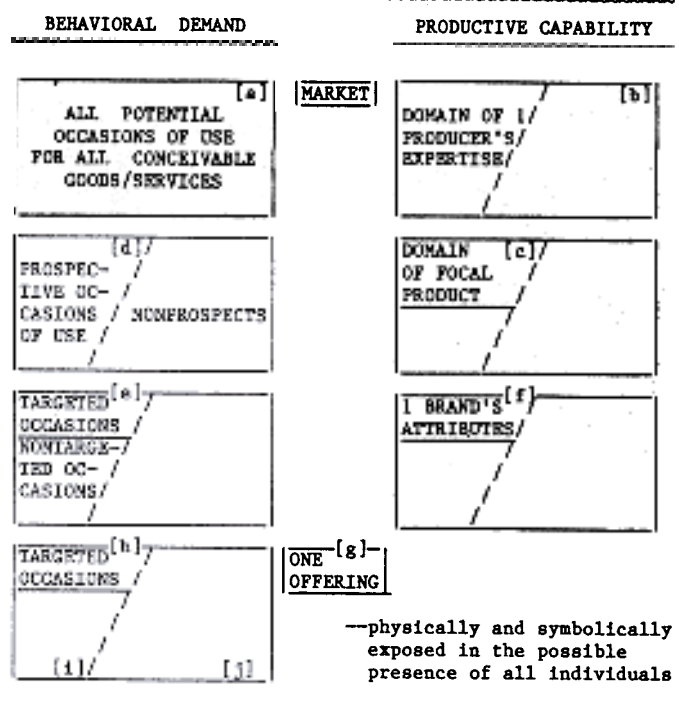


Figure 1 see Fennell (1988, Figure 1), this volume.]

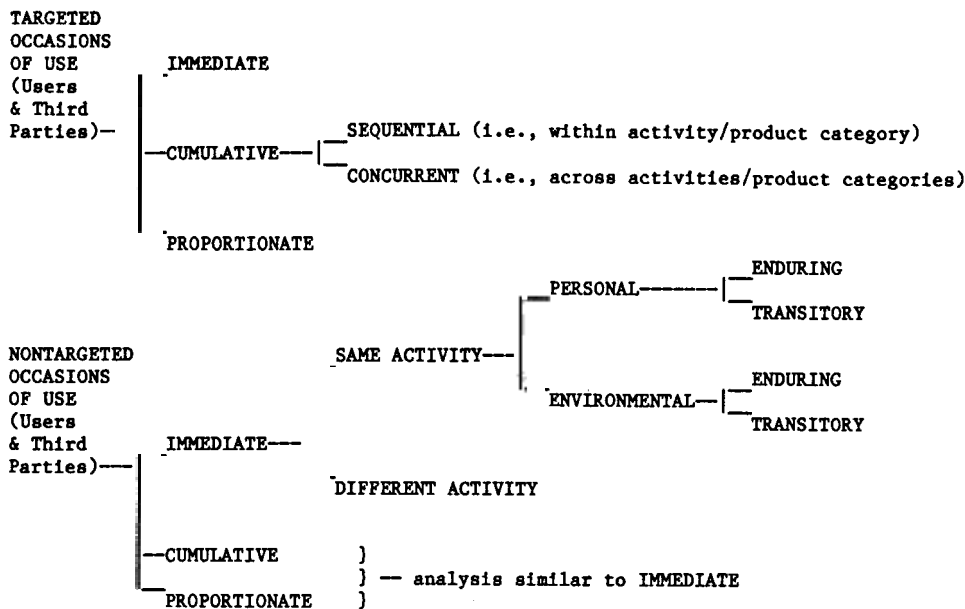
This means that goods/services are offered/displayed in the presence of individuals for whom they may be hurtful physically or psychically, e.g., alcoholic beverages in the presence of alcoholics; all kinds of substances harmless for many, yet possibly lethal for individuals who are allergic to them; sports equipment in the presence of individuals whose physical handicaps bar them from enjoying such activities; and, of course, a wide variety of offerings that are beyond people's means to acquire.

In sum, producers make goods/services for contexts of use that they themselves may never have experienced. Then, using mass media to announce the availability of goods/services designed for targeted contexts of use, producers expose such information in the possible presence of all—nonprospects and nontargeted prospects, as well as targets.

To keep within the limits of available space, we restrict the present discussion to a scope commensurate with the treatments by Kotler (1987)¹ and Dholakia et al. (1987). We focus on the relationship between producer and target and consider only the effects of the user's physical contact with the offering. A more comprehensive treatment of ethical aspects of the marketer's role as the producer's in-house representative of consumer perspectives is available elsewhere (e.g., Fennell 1987b).

Even if we consider only the parties directly involved in the transaction, we must take cognizance of multiple aspects of the time dimension (Figure 2). As regards using a good/service for its targeted purpose, producers presumably take cognizance of known possibilities for harm that are immediate, delayed, or cumulative upon repeated use (cumu-

¹ In fact, very little of Kotler's paper refers to marketing, as distinct from selling. Moreover, to the extent that his "humanistic" examples refer to marketing proper, they are fully provided for under the umbrella of the marketing concept. We focus here mainly on the issues that his paper evoked in Dholakia et al. (1987).



lative--sequential). There are other less obvious possibilities. Sharing labor between user and producer leads to specialization among producers, who study specific domains of their prospects' behavior in order to make appropriate offerings. Such a system lacks a built-in mechanism whereby producers' attention is drawn from their area of specialization to other, concurrent, aspects of an individual's life, where relevant events may be occurring (cumulative--concurrent). For example, such a feature of productive specialization could account for the deterioration in muscle tone and general physique that accompanied transferring effort from human muscle to machine, which occurred simultaneously in so many domains of daily life. Eventually, members of the medical community began to comment and, as the public became educated to the implications of leading a "soft life," the physical fitness craze was born. Voluntarily, many people now engage regularly in strenuous activity, which was their inescapable lot in earlier times.

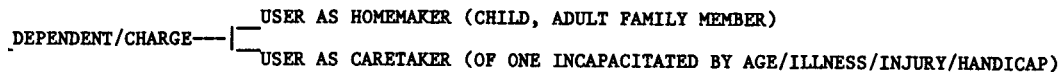
A final aspect of the time dimension, proportionality, remains for comment. Some items--candy bars, white bread, and video games, for example--are potentially harmful only when their users allow them to assume a disproportionate place in their lives. In sum, concurrent cumulation and disproportionality are two aspects of the time dimension

that may implicate harm in relatively subtle ways. Minimally, they suggest that even as regards trying to avoid harming consumers, in the complex conditions of today's productive arrangements, the responsibility of any one producer exists in a context that implicates the actions of other producers and of consumers themselves.

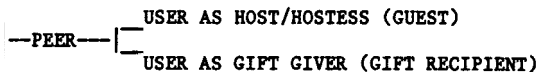
Yet other dimensions of complexity exist. In some circumstances, producers have two effective targets--effects may accrue not only to users but to third parties i.e., individuals whom users involve in consuming a good/service (Figure 3). People use goods/services not only for themselves but for others who are in their care. Problems of third party effects may be the result. People who have other individuals in their care or their power may use goods/services in harmful ways, through ignorance, by accident, or intentionally. Users may also involve independent others in a variety of ways. Greeting card manufacturers happily assist people in the chore of composing messages that bring good wishes to others on a wide range of occasions. What about helping people say the less pleasant things that people utter, and wish they could utter, to others? Depending on the circumstances, the same verbal message may be a mean-spirited attempt to cause pain to another or a justified assertion of one's rights, in the presence of a bully.

FIGURE 3 SOME THIRD PARTY RELATIONSHIPS

SELF AS SOLE USER



SELF & OTHERS--



Finally, whatever a producer's original intention, once goods/services are produced and available for purchase, the people into whose possession they pass--rather than their producer--directly control their use. They are available for whatever purpose the human mind may devise. Some items are potentially harmful only when used in contexts other than those for which they were designed, giving rise to the problem of *open-ended use*. For example, a capsule containing a remedy for minor pain can be used as a lethal weapon; a telephone can be used to harass.

In sum, division of labor replaced the user and producer roles of an individual with a system whereby numerous producers help individuals effect their individual purposes by means of goods/services produced, announced, displayed, and exchanged in impersonal transactions. The task of avoiding harm through the goods/services thus made available is multifaceted, and not totally under the control of any one producer. The ramifications of today's productive arrangements have been neglected by marketing scholars. It is time to make good this deficiency, by articulating their inherent complexity, and possibilities for harm, at those points where the producer's control--and accountability--is and is not shared by other producers and by consumers.

PROVIDING FOR LONG-TERM BENEFIT

When we turn to consider a possible obligation to provide long-term benefit, the task seems immeasurably more difficult. It is hard to see how a producer may effectively provide for the long term benefit of individuals. For a start, specifically which individuals are in question: People who are exposed to producers' messages, or to their offerings on display, whether nonprospects, targeted or nontargeted prospects; people who come into possession of goods/services legally or illegally; people who use a good/service for its targeted purpose or for other purposes of the user's devising? Consider, for an instant, the simplest case of a targeted user, using a good/service for its targeted purpose. How can a producer plan to ensure that the individual's act in using the item is ultimately beneficial? Even knowing the user as an individual, on what basis could a producer claim that using a particular good/service contributes to that person's long-term benefit?

Only consider the arguments on this very issue that arise between parents or guardians and their children or charges. It is at least arguable that a parent/guardian, by virtue of being more experienced than a minor child, has an edge in wisdom. On what basis can "producers" claim to know better than "users" what is in the user's long term interest? Through studying the behavioral domains to which their productive capability is relevant, producers may acquire knowledge that is more broadly-based than an individual is likely to possess. Yet it is hard to see how a producer can use such information to promise long-term benefit to an individual. In today's impersonal marketplace, producers can, at best, know users only in probabilistic terms. How then can a producer prescribe a course of action for the long-term benefit of a real, flesh and blood, individual user? And users exist only as individuals.

Considering the case of a minor child may be helpful in two respects. In the first place, it reminds us that humankind finds wisdom hard to accept. Individuals find it notoriously difficult to appreciate that a course of action, recommended by a supposed authority, offers long-term benefit that outweighs what they want to do in the here and now. It is hard, even when the Wise One is a loving parent, who may be presumed to have good information about the target of the advice. An impersonal producer--or a distant central planner, for that matter--is flawed as a source of counsel on two counts: They lack information about the user as an individual, and their motives for any particular piece of counsel can never be above suspicion. Accordingly, a producer's inability to make a grounded promise of long-term

benefit is an overriding consideration in ruling out such a claim, which, in any case, would have to be ranked among the very weakest in likely persuasive impact.²

The second lesson relates to being the recipient of counsel "for one's own benefit." However useful such advice may be in principle, it implies a relationship of dependency that many feel must be outgrown as one assumes the status of adult. "Humanistic" marketing suggests, in effect, that a posture of "father knows best" is appropriate for those in control of society's productive enterprise. Such a suggestion places consumers in the role of minor children when, in fact, the user's status vis a vis the producer is of a far different order. The yardstick for assessing the utility of productive output is the user's purposes i.e., the characteristics of the contexts of use that are the output's justification and destination. It was not part of the bargain that, dividing labor between users and producers for efficiency's sake, users were to relinquish their interest in having goods/services tailored to their wants.

In sum, it goes without saying that producers should make information readily available to prospective users so that users may make informed choices. At best, such choices are subject to the uncertainty that is part of the human condition. Neither multiple competing producers nor central planners may, with integrity, claim to know what is ultimately beneficial for individual human beings--a claim consumers would have the good sense to reject, as groundless and suspect. Moreover, it would be an unwarranted attempt to encroach on the domain of adult persons who make the best choices they can, given available information, knowing there are no guarantees of a beneficial outcome down the line.

Speaking of providing long-term benefit for individuals (as opposed to avoiding causing harm), one enters territory that philosophers have regarded as their preserve, when they discuss the concept of the "good life." Making the choices of a good life is a challenge each human faces, and a good life results from a combination of internal and external goods. According to Aristotle, "Happiness consists in a complete life lived in accordance with virtue and accompanied by a moderate possession of external goods" (Adler, 1984, p 116). One's own efforts and favorable circumstances contribute to the presence of "external" possessions, comprising not only the economic goods that marketers provide but goods from political and social institutions. As one among many contributing factors, marketers' role in creating lives of quality for individual human beings may be most responsibly discharged by striving for excellence in marketing's particular domain.

MARKETING'S ROLE

The notion that business knows "what is best" for a consumer is likely foreign to the thinking of marketing practitioners, who are painfully aware of lacking information adequate for their immediate task. To ensure that producers make the kinds of goods/services that people would make for themselves, practitioners particularly need to know about the influences that are allocating prospects' resources, disposing them toward one kind of outcome rather than another. It is scarcely in the cards that business would begin to claim to know what serves customers' long-term benefit, other than in such limited contexts as ensuring that they know of planned technological or design changes, when such information is available within the trade.

² Space limitations make this our only reference to our opening question (2): Are "participating in" and "changing" in fact equally available as options to marketers? Our brief answer is: With competitors ready to provide what users want in the here and now, individual producers must understand that changing the outcomes that people seek is an unrealistic objective.

For the immediate future, great challenges face the marketing discipline--scientists and practitioners alike--in executing the task that society has assigned. Society's two-fold charge is to: 1) The research and analytic skills of practitioners who, as consumers' inhouse representatives to producers, must describe the circumstances of prospective users, and 2) The creativity of marketing scientists--to construct representations of relevant aspects of the natural world that aid practitioners in their task of directing technological deployment systematically in response to user-circumstances. As represented in Figure 1, producers' expertise is in the domain of productive capability. It is for marketers to provide expertise in the domain of behavioral demand, a task that the discipline has scarcely begun to address.

Implementing marketing's assignment means articulating the conditions of human lives--the internal and external contexts for the myriad activities of everyday living. The goods/services that become available under marketing practitioners' influence are an integral part of the quality of individual human lives, but the more significant contribution may be that of marketing scientists. As they begin to develop models for practitioners to use in doing the job that society assigns, and to accumulate data under the models' guidance, human beings will have taken their first systematic step toward describing human nature. Individually and collectively, humanity will begin to know itself as never before. We may not like all that we learn about ourselves, but, as has often happened in the past, noticing problems may be a first step toward making improvements.

As may be evident from reviewing the complexity of providing against harming people through goods/services, marketers are at a rudimentary stage of the modeling necessary to discharge that first obligation. Improving such models must be a top priority. As marketers, practitioners and scientists, begin systematically to build a base of information about the human condition, some components of what constitutes the long-term benefit of human beings may begin to be identified. That will be marketers' route to contributing to human progress, preferable by far to donning a cloak of humanistic concern today in conditions where such a claim is patently vacuous.

SOME SPECIFIC ISSUES

It is appropriate now to return to the discussion that originally prompted this paper--the editors' comments on the papers written by Fennell and Kotler in the volume, Philosophical and Radical Thought in Marketing, as representative of two positions on the marketer's obligation. Dholakia et al. compare the two as follows (p. 376):

"Important issues are raised by Fennell's practitioner's perspective and Kotler's humanist perspective when they are considered in conjunction... While Fennell separates social advocacy from marketing, the demarcation point being the central approach--marketing as a participant in existing behavior, social advocacy as a change agent of behaviors--Kotler's humanistic marketing sounds like Fennell's social advocacy. Humanistic marketing, according to Kotler, ought to advocate change if what is presently wanted by the consumers is to their long-term detriment. Marketing, in its humanistic phase, must take into consideration the long-term implications of present consumption as well as long-term benefits for consumers and society. Are the two approaches presented by Kotler and Fennell really that different? If not, what unites them? If yes, what differentiates them?"

It should now be clear from the above discussion, that the marketer's obligation in Fennell's approach, is grounded on the user-producer covenant, i.e., the labor of satisfying wants is divided between user and producer for greater efficiency. When Dholakia et al. speak of consumers' "long-

term detriment," we agree: Producers are obligated not to harm consumers with their products and to disclose what is known about possibly harmful side effects. The issue changes, however, when Dholakia et al. switch to speaking of "long-term benefits for consumers and society." They continue:

"The two approaches may meet if one considers that longterm benefit could be a product that consumers demand. If so, according to Fennell, marketing ought to provide it. Consumers do not only demand immediate satisfaction of needs, but usually have a vision or purpose regarding their future lives. A consumer demand from the marketing system in society is that such a system should research, seek, and inform consumers on the possible alternative life forms and patterns for the future as well as on the ways of achieving these alternative lives. While this is a consumer need, marketing seems to fall short most in this responsibility."

It is difficult to see how "long-term benefit" qualifies as a product. Division of labor refers to sharing the work of doing the things people try to do. Whether long-term benefit accrues depends on many things, including whether or not individuals make choices that are "right" for them, and whether they have good fortune. What evidence is there that "(consumers) have a vision or purpose regarding their future lives," and how specific is this or can it be? To what does the "marketing system" refer? To General Electric, General Motors, Proctor and Gamble? There is no unitary "marketing system" other than as a construction. What would it mean for the "system" to "research, seek, and inform...on the possible alternative life forms and...on ways of achieving these alternative lives?" Are GM, GE and P&G to research alternative life forms (e.g., whether one should live a married/single life, the best age to marry, presence/absence/number of children, rural/urban, encumbered/unencumbered by possessions), and state advantages and disadvantages of each, and how to attain them? Even if such information were available in probabilistic terms, how would individuals know which course was right for them? What qualifications do GM, and the others have for getting into such domains? More realistically, if GE provides this function for household maintenance, GM for private transportation, and P&G for hygiene and grooming, the same questions apply. For example, suppose that Chrysler, Ford, and GM announce the pros and cons of owning a large/medium/small car, and how to go about putting oneself in the position to acquire each kind. Who is going to read it, or believe that it is written without ulterior motive? How is an individual going to reconcile differences, if any, in opinions of each of the three companies, and proceed to choose what is in his/her particular long-term benefit? The training that secular and religious education provides to help people make good choices may be deficient, but marketers are scarcely equipped to make good the deficit.

There is surely a human "need to know" (that was Eve's sin, as we recall), to have the wisdom to make choices that serve our long-term benefit, and to lead a good life. The human race lost such a blissful state when it was cast out of paradise. Moreover, in their life experience most humans have known and lost the state of being cared for by one who has their long-term benefit in mind. Each form of society, both real-world and utopian, tries to approach some kind of paradise on earth. The society we live in offers its attempt, different in some respects from what other societies offer. Perhaps "marketing" is readily available to blame for the fact that the human race has not found a way to regain paradise. But, is it not stretching things to suggest that marketing is "responsible" for informing consumers on ways of achieving alternative lives?

Dholakia et al. appear to believe that some individuals in society possess the requisite information and wisdom, which others in society lack:

"A more complex issue is the identification of the benefi-

cial ways. Who knows what is beneficial or beneficial according to whom? To know what is beneficial, one has to have information. Therefore, how and to whom information is disseminated in society becomes of prime interest. If everyone had access to total information about products as well as their direct and indirect effects, and each could equally participate in social choices, then again the Kotler and Fennell perspectives might meet."

It is not a matter of "disseminating" information so much as generating information about what is in an individual's long-term benefit. The operative question is whether such information is available in principle, or ever will be. It is not only a matter of knowing the direct and indirect effects of products, but of knowing what is "good" for each individual. For example, is it good or bad to own a car that reaches 80 miles an hour in a wink and so smoothly it feels like 50? Or to have a problem with the car that one successfully contests with the maker, or unsuccessfully, leading one to badmouth the car to all who will listen, and to feel tempted to kick the dog? Is it "good for us" to eat or not to eat this particular apple we are reaching for? Is paradise "good" for people? It may be good for people who can live there, but awfully bad for those who must live in a world short of paradise. Who knows the answers to such questions? Not the "marketing system," not individual corporations, and not even central planners. The requisite information is not available to permit marketers to claim to be able to provide for the long-term benefit of an individual in the conditions of the impersonal marketplace.

The Kotler and Fennell perspectives do not come together as Dholakia et al. propose. The information does not exist to prescribe what is in the long-term benefit of any individual and, even if it did, marketers/producers do not know users as individuals. Moreover, in helping people do the things that people, themselves, try to do (within law and ethics), marketers/producers have an assignment that is complex--and honorable--enough that they don't need to claim to do anything else.

Finally, Dholakia et al. offer some comments on the role of persuasive communication in regard to the marketer's obligation:

"When such information is available, however, will the necessity for persuasive communication in society disappear? In a way, Fennell asks for such disappearance when she argues for marketing as she defines it. The issue is, however, can anyone know what they want or need, can anyone articulate their demand without social interaction and, as a consequence, without social influence? If there is complete independence in demand, then pure marketing is fine. But if there is any interdependence, then persuasion through influence is a reality, and the problem is one of differential access to sources and means of persuasion. Those who have greater access will have greater persuasive powers. In such a case, we need to study the causes of differential access to such sources and means."

Here Dholakia et al. seem to acknowledge that the requisite information is not now available. As to persuasion, of course it occurs in marketing: By appropriately formulating goods/services, individual producers try to persuade people to become repeat users of their wares. In fact, producers use two modes of communication: Words and the attributes of their offerings which, in the interest of repeated use, must deliver what the words promise.

Dholakia, et al. fail to make a crucial distinction--between social influence that one marketer/producer may exert and other forms of social influence. Consumers may want a particular kind of item to impress some significant individual. That kind of social influence preexists the intervention of any one marketer. Upon learning of such an influence in people's lives, marketers may respond to it.

They know better than to try to change the kind of outcome that people value. Understandably, people who have not stood in a marketer's shoes may misperceive a marketer's influence. Individual consumers may feel overwhelmed by what seems like a monolithic "marketing system." They may experience the messages exposed in the media--in advertising, news, and entertainment--as manifestations of an omnipresent force. Such an impression is not too different from the experience of individual marketers as they contemplate trying to make their voice heard. In the midst of so many preexisting influences and competing messages, marketers have come to realize that their only hope is to tap into motivations already in place.

CONCLUSION

In juxtaposing the views of Fennell and Kotler on marketers' responsibility, Dholakia et al. (1987) provide a welcome opportunity to further sharpen the relevant issues. Fennell sees marketers as collaborating with users, trying to understand the user's world from the user's perspective in order to guide producers to make what users would make for themselves. In her view, marketers' responsibility reaches to helping users do what they are already trying to do, within the constraints of law and ethics. Kotler advocates a more paternal role, suggesting that marketers should go beyond taking the user's perspective, to providing what the marketer claims will benefit the user. From the unexceptionable issue of marketers' responsibility to avoid harming users, Dholakia et al. slip into suggesting that marketers must provide for the long-term benefit of users. They ask if Fennell's view does not in fact meet Kotler's, since people demand their long-term benefit as a product that the "marketing system" should provide.

For a variety of reasons, we have argued that marketers cannot claim to provide for users' long-term benefit. Moreover, it is important that laypeople do not believe that marketers claim to act in loco parentis: In conditions of mass manufacturing, distribution, and communications, with accompanying impersonal exchange--at-a-distance, it is a claim (1) On which marketers cannot hope to deliver and (2) Which can only act as an untoward distraction from clarifying marketers' role as users' responsible partners--not guardians--in the myriad undertakings of human lives.

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