



COMMENTARY

Paths to marketing's future: a sub-first tier GATORE principle perspective

Paths to
marketing's
future

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to propose steps marketing stakeholders should and can take to facilitate increasing the speed at which marketing proceeds to evolve – toward the stars and beyond.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing from the literature advanced by first-tier scholars the confusion surrounding marketing's future is examined.

Findings – Marketing, in its various manifestations, has been, is, and will continue to be, of enormous human benefit.

Originality/value – This paper recommends that all marketers subscribe to the normative marketing stakeholders' model presented and the open-minded exchange is prescribed.

Keywords Marketing, Stakeholder analysis

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Marketing, where are you going? This question has been raised and addressed by numerous omnipotently endowed scholars from many of the best first tier colleges and universities. While anyone of these addresses, when viewed individually, may appear to have captured the answer, confusion results when they are viewed in juxtaposition. Therefore, this article will attempt to reduce the above noted confusion by:

- identifying a few of the most noted alternative paths to marketing's future;
- bringing transparency to the alternative paths and as a result reveal the innate value of their divergence and confluence in forecasting marketing's future; and
- conceptualizing a path which serves to blend the fruitful landscape mapped by the first tier scholars and represents a twenty-first century collaborative stakeholder's perspective.

Alternative paths

The paths to marketing's future can be viewed as a continuum where death occupies one extreme and forms of conditionally defined existence at the other multiple extremes – Figure 1. Thus, the future of marketing is presented as an optimization decision characterized by alternatives ranging from merely amending the status quo i.e. modification of the traditional marketing mix (4Ps) (Booms and Bitner, 1981; Goldsmith, 2004) to the more extreme of engineering a major paradigm shift away from a traditional transaction, exchange, marketing concept and logical



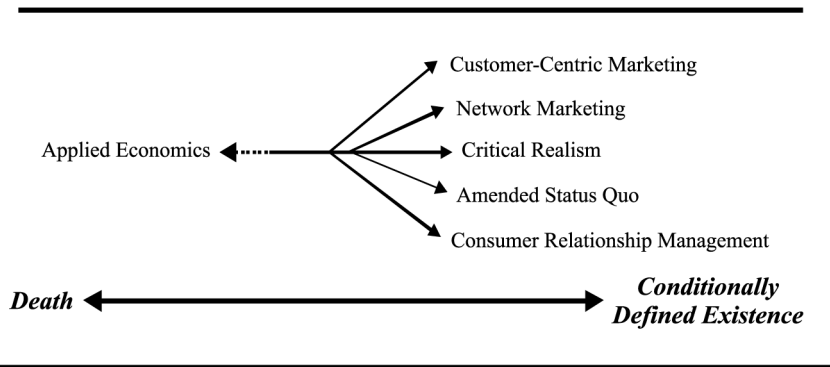


Figure 1.
Paths to marketing's
future

positivism/empiricism and more toward consumer relationship management (CRM) (Mazur, 2000), customer-centric marketing (Sheth *et al.*, 2000), network marketing (Achrol, 1997; Snow, 1997) and critical realism (Easton, 2002).

These views are proposed both explicitly and implicitly by marketing practitioners and academics residing on a number of continents. While some do suggest that marketing is simply in the throes of a mid-life crisis (Brown, 1995; Clarke and Mount, 2001), others offer a more pessimistic diagnosis of a critically ill state (Holbrook and Hulbert, 2002), brought on by potentially devastating maladies such as the duality in purpose of marketing (Bagozzi and Natarajan, 2000), epistemopathology – diseased, sick and bad knowledge (Thomas, 2000), and the failure of marketing as a discipline to communicate very well with its various constituencies (Camey and Williams, 2004; Malhotra *et al.*, 1999; Razzaque, 1998). Therefore, it is not surprising that after reading the literature, one would be at a minimum somewhat perplexed if not totally mystified when attempting to contemplate the future of marketing.

Paths' transparency

Attempting to discern acknowledgment of the origin of marketing reveals one of the first elements (if not the core) of the above noted confusion. Although many scholars subscribe to Bartel's pronouncement (Bartels, 1962) that the early 1900s mark the origin of marketing (Bagozzi and Natarajan, 2000; Bussiere, 2000; Wilkie and Moore, 2003), there are a number of others who put forth equally justifiable and thus valid dates. Brown (1995) suggests that it was somehow appropriate that marketing should be facing a mid-life crisis in at that time its fortieth year. Holbrook and Hulbert (2002, p. 726) provide some levity by implying a need to carbon date test marketing as a means of uncovering its age:

[...], recognizing that marketing is as old as original sin,

One of the most in-your-face challenges to Bartel's pronouncement is the rebuttal posited by Dixon (2002, p. 88):

The Oxford English Dictionary traces the use of the term to the 16th century; it certainly did not originate in the United States between 1905 and 1911 (Bartels, 1962).

In this particular case, Dixon is also unearthing a subterranean attitude held by some that the writings of many American scholars implicitly lay claim to having proprietary

rights over the past, present and future development of marketing. Possession of such rights would thus serve to subjugate all other opinions and views to a second class status. Therefore, the debate over when marketing originated has more to do with giving credit, credibility and divine authenticity to a given linear path. Given this insight, what appears to be an on going directional tug-of-war conflict is transformed into a transparent state of expanding enlightenment characterized by forward moving divergence and confluence.

If for the sake of argument, the German Historical School of Economics is assumed as the ground which served to germinate marketing as a formal academic discipline (Jones and Monieson, 1990), then Figure 2 reflects the present day international perspective of marketing. The richly valued diversity of this perspective further serves to make moot many of the other apparent conflicts found in the marketing literature i.e. marketing's philosophical basis (science/art), the applied domain of marketing (narrow/broad), number of marketing schools of thought 12 (Sheth, 1988) vs 4 (Wright, 2002) and of course the perpetually increasing multitude of marketing definitions.

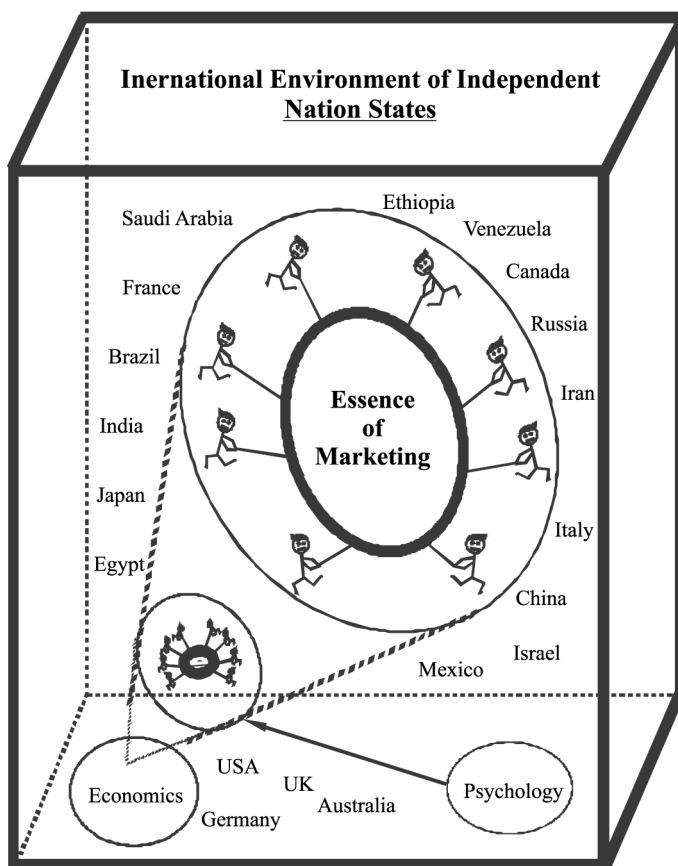


Figure 2.
A present day perspective
of marketing

Stakeholders' perspective

One can not read the literature without being amazed by marketing's strong condition of health and growth despite the disjointed behavior of its stakeholders in both the Educational and Practitioner sub-environments. Figure 3 depicts the disjointedness of these stakeholders. To no great surprise, the Practitioner sub-environment holds three major components (political, social and economic) and their respective agents which have been purposefully configured by each Nation State as a means of promoting the welfare of their own citizenry. Although there may appear to be enormous zero sum game differences among the Nation States, there does exist a modest and productive level of continuing interdependent exchange which is here symbolized by the dashed line enclosing the Practitioner environment. Ignoring the United Nations' inconsistent

Global Environment

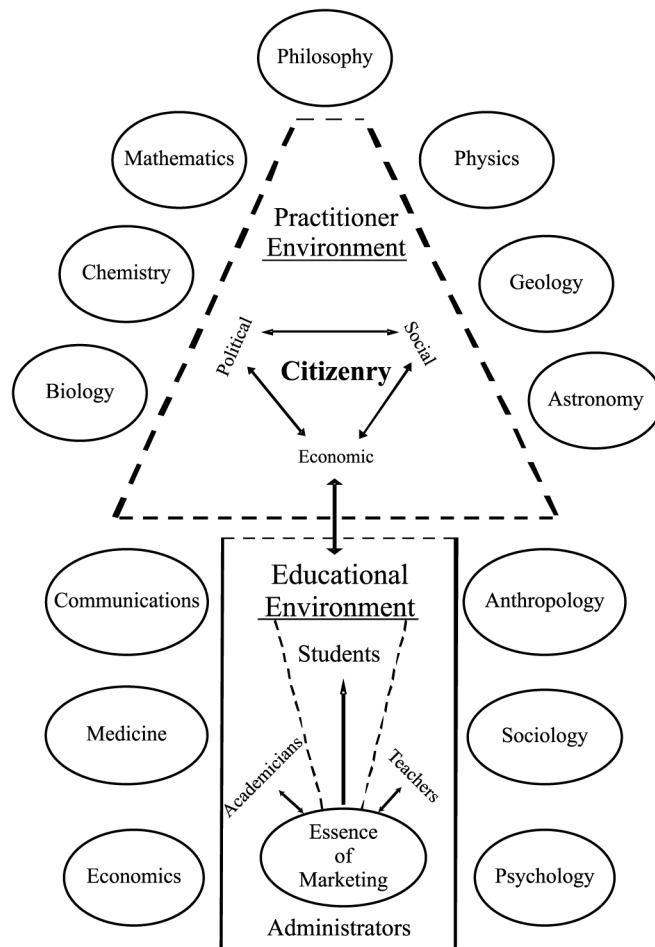


Figure 3.
Descriptive marketing
stakeholders' model

potency, its mere existence attests to this productive exchange. The Nation State Practitioner enclaves – because of their own individual orthodoxies – present diversely important challenges to those who are endeavoring to advance marketing as a formal discipline. Examination of these challenges is beyond the designed scope of this article.

Within the Educational sub-environment there are four major groups of actors (administrators, academicians, teachers and students). These actors find themselves locked in a permafrost state capable of preserving a herd of Woolly Mammoths – a state of deep seated disharmony, destructive competition and non-retractable conflict. Collectively these stakeholders can take little solace in the fact that many other educational domains, to a greater/lesser degree (psychology, political science, legal studies, medicine and management), are also afflicted by this state of affairs. In addition, one is left to believe that those in the marketing domain are characterized by a tin ear since that domain was enriched (some 40 plus years earlier) by the conceptually perfect pitch of Theodore Levitt's marketing myopia classic (Levitt, 1960).

A more detailed examination of the marketing educational domain as portrayed in Figure 3 reflects a body of innocent student stakeholders:

- within a domain which has at best a deficient and limited relationship with the practitioner sub-environment;
- wedged between the ideological clash of academicians in pursuit of empirical findings and teachers debating the supremacy of opposing pedagogical tools; and
- ill served by the short sighted resource allocation decisions of a transient body of administrators seeking to secure prestigious positions at first-tier universities.

Predictably, these behaviors and their concomitant by-products are to be expected when the synthesis of education is supplanted by the rigor of indoctrination as the *modus operandi* because of the on going investment made in "Physics Envy" (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005).

A sub-first tier perspective

Attempting to prophesize the definitive path to marketing's future is an act of benign presumptuousness which resides beyond the egotistical nature of the author of this article. However, addressing the questions of what should and can be done to promote the natural evolution of marketing does fall just within the fringes of this author's sub-first tier abilities.

What should be done?

The question of what should be done, calls for a macro prescription – a statement which lays down a guide, direction, or rule of action. Such a prescription can be found in the metamorphic transition of the descriptive model seen in Figure 3 into the normative model presented in Figure 4. This metamorphosis suggests a new state of open minded exchange between all stakeholders and thus reflects a true state of collaboration in advancing the essence of marketing. In addition, this transition implicitly stipulates that every marketing stakeholder has the authority to ethically pursue their vision of how best to advance the discipline while simultaneously being responsible and accountable for providing non-self-promoting constructive criticism of the views put forth by others.

While the commentaries Bolton (2004) invited on Vargo and Lusch (2004, p. 7) "Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing" would seem to illustrate the above

**Galactic Environment:
*A Path to Marketing's future***

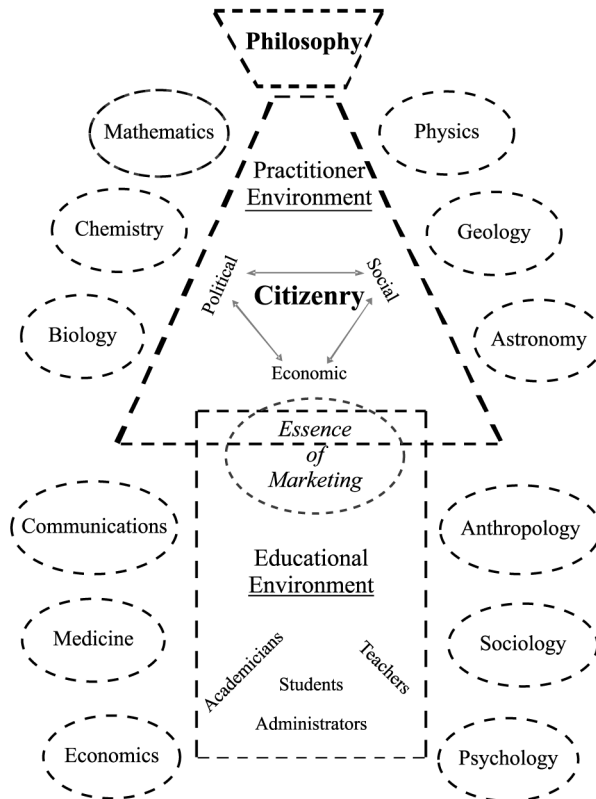


Figure 4.
Normative marketing
stakeholders' model

recommended prescription, the opinion provided by Ambler demonstrates them to be the very antithesis.

A striking aspect of the Vargo and Lusch paper and the commentaries is the extent to which the authors write from their established points-of-view. Day (2004), for example, sees "market driven" and Prahalad (2004) sees co-creation of value and references show precisely these concepts in their recent works. That does not make one wrong and another right. It only indicates that academics view the marketing elephant in the way that each has become accustomed, or trained, to do.

On the other hand, William L. Wilkie's critique (Wilkie, 2005) of the AMA's new definition of Marketing truly exemplifies the spirit of the recommended prescription. Although his stature within the community of first tier scholars provides some initial buoyancy for his criticism, it is the open minded soundness of his argument which resonates with enormous clarity within the barrios occupied by sub-first tier marketers. Even though he does not claim to see Ambler's elephant nor deign its existence, one is left with the belief that Wilkie recognizes his own relative subjectivity

in viewing the whole of something big. Therefore, one would be inclined to attribute to both Wilkie and Ambler the wisdom of having as a plank in the base of their logic the GATORE Principle – knowledge is context relative unless refuted in testimony by God And Ten Other Reputable Entities.

With the preeminence of such exchanges as the rule and no longer the exception, advances in marketing theory and application could parallel those seen in the field of Neuroscience. The point/counterpoint exchange with regard to which competing theory of neurotransmission was most valid – electrical/sparker vs. chemical/souper (Kandel, 2006) – comes to mind. This case holds extremely poignant insight for both marketing practitioners and educators. The more valid chemical theory prevailed and has provided a foundation upon which invaluable practitioner oriented treatments for human disorders now rest i.e. treating the symptoms of Parkinson's through the application of a chemical dopamine precursor called L-dopa. In addition, this case illustrates that having one's theory refuted need not be a personal condemnation, given the theory resulted from a sincere effort to advance the discipline. This latter benefit was indicated by Nobel laureate Sir John C. Eccles, a major proponent of the electrical theory:

I learned from Popper what for me is the essence of scientific investigation – how to be speculative and imaginative in the creation of hypothesis, and then to challenge them with the utmost rigor, both by utilizing all existing knowledge and by mounting the most searching experimental attacks. In fact I learned from him even to rejoice in refutation of a cherished hypothesis because that, too, is a scientific achievement and because much has been learned by the refutation (Kandel, 2006, p. 97).

What can be done?

The question of what can be done functions as a call to operationalize the normative model presented in Figure 4 and the open minded exchange it prescribes. This question explicitly beseeches all marketing stakeholders to subscribe to – attest or pledge to by signing – a commitment in conscience. A commitment to consciously adhere to a self-selected integrated set of measures designed to combat Physics Envy and other ills which may serve to impede the rate at which marketing's essence can be further cultivated.

A number of potentially beneficial measures have been proposed from the relative perspectives held by the various stakeholder bodies. A limited collection of these measures is presented in the following list. The stakeholder (authorship) body from which each measure was extracted is purposefully not identified in an attempt (admittedly small) to advance the above noted transition with impartiality. The following three examples serve to illustrate the ease with which this set of measures or a similar set can be acted upon once the commitment is established. The measures to combat physics envy are as follows:

- (1) Act with pride, confidence and humility when speaking truth to power as a result of endorsing the GATORE Principles.
- (2) Act as an innovator by creating new cutting edges and/or as an early adopter by adding to the sharpness of other relatively new cutting edges.
- (3) Act as an agent to inform and/or remind the public (including other marketing stakeholders) of the interdisciplinary and interdependent nature of marketing's theoretical relevance and applied value – no need for persuasion.

- (4) Act to safeguard the continued use of older and justifiably treasured tools which are periodically confronted by the threat of a forced replacement from the hype surrounding the adoption of untested by time newly minted tools.
- (5) Act as an eclectic stakeholder by taking into account the perspectives held by others before advancing a proposition because its validity is predicated on what was considered which in turn was preceded by what was acknowledged.

Example (1): Safeguarding treasured older tools. Chronicling the older marketing tools discarded or simply put aside for no other reason than lacking the luster emanating from the new tool of the day would make for an AACSB academically qualifying publication. Fortunately, the Marketing Mix (4P's) will not be a member of that group because it has been able to weather many attempted dethroning assaults. If only the insight provided by Wilkinson and Young (2001), buttressed by the axiom like advice advanced by Ambler (2004), had been employed as part of a broad set of litmus test measures, surely in many cases the luster would have been appropriately characterized as a fool's gold variety:

The internet and computer technologies do not alter the fundamental relevance of our theories of markets and marketing. Instead, they are new context within which these principles and theories operate (Wilkinson and Young, 2001, p. 85).

In reviewing the historical development of marketing thinking, this essay proposes that new concepts should be tested for validity and whether they add anything new. Those that survive should be added to the basket of theory as distinct from replacing previous theory (Ambler, 2004, p. 9).

Example (2): To inform and/or remind others. Acting to inform and/or remind others of Marketing's interdisciplinary and interdependent nature can be advanced through adopting a consilience conceptual perspective (Wilson, 1998, p. 8):

Literally a jumping together of knowledge by the linking of facts and fact-based theory across disciplines to create a common groundwork for explanation.

As an applied extension of the theory of "tacit knowledge" (Hackley, 1999), "Imbricative Analysis" (Carr *et al.*, 2002) illustrates a consilience perspective. In this particular case, individual's from three different disciplines (marketing, law, and psychology) demonstrate that the divide between theory and practice can be bridged when the normally unarticulated aspects of an expert's knowledge is overtly expressed. Unintentionally, Anderson and McAuley (1999, p. 185) provide evidential merit for the strategic value of imbricative analysis when attempting to demonstrate that marketing theory can not be applied universally without taking account of context:

Interestingly, we started by noting that the classic 4Ps were too simplistic, more valuable as descriptors than analytic categories. However, by combining the qualitative findings about value with the 4Ps we can reach a much richer understanding. Of course, the Ps were not a marketing strategy as such, but they were a reflection of value orientation, in turn, a representation of personal taste and judgments. Nonetheless they are significant within the strategy.

Example (3): Creating new cutting edges. Acting innovatively to create new cutting edges is embedded within the normative stakeholders' model presented in Figure 4 – a *Galactic* environment is indicated. This view was implicitly suggested by Willekens and Peeters (1998) when describing how the European Space Agency (ESA) could

market to its multiple targets and in an earlier article by Green and Miesing (1984) when they discussed the key marketing questions concerning the operation of the space shuttle fleet. Writings in the area of space tourism represent a more focused examination of this new frontier (Crouch, 2001; Crouch and Laing, 2004; Crouch *et al.*, 2005). The ultimate twenty-first century pervasiveness of a Galactic environment, although futuristic, is as equally inevitable as was the ultimate diffusion of the Global perspective during the early twentieth century. Both were at some earlier point in time a proposition predicated on what was considered during their incubation, which in turn was preceded by all that was acknowledged during their gestation.

Conclusion

So marketing, where are you going? The answer is clear, toward the stars and beyond. Given this response, the question which now remains is how fast will marketing proceed? It is this latter question which served as the major theme for this article – a theme framed by the questions of what should and can be done to promote the natural evolution of Marketing. To this end, a normative model and a recommendation to subscribe to a self-selected set of measures designed to combat Physics Envy were proposed.

Acting upon both proposals initially falls within the unilateral prerogatives of every marketing stakeholder and should be viewed as only the first step. Of equal importance, is the active adoption of these proposals by each stakeholder group. Although achieving the proposals at warp or light speed may be overly optimistic, the speed of sound is literally very reasonable. Given academics (academicians/teachers) and practitioners are the two most important shapers of marketing knowledge (Razzaque, 1998), the natural evolution of marketing can reach and sustain the speed of sound through accelerating the permeation of joint dialogue and collaboration between these two stakeholder groups.

In conclusion, the onus of initiating and perpetuating the adoption of the prescription and subscription proposed within this paper rest with us academics. Even if the best interest of our students is not motivation enough to adopt these proposals, surely our sincere love of being marketers can drive us to act. But recognize, our failure to shoulder this responsibility will not prevent marketing from evolving – be it at the speed of a sloth. Marketing in its various manifestations has been, is and will continue to be of enormous human benefit. Therefore, the periodic vocalized incarnations of marketing's demise – to paraphrase Shelby Hunt (Hunt, 2001, p. 117) – are nothing more than attempts by some to be profound resulting in the obscure.

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