

(A Rejoinder)

Toward a Broader Concept of Marketing's Role in Social Order

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It strikes us that the article by Lacznik and Michie is a welter of misunderstandings and fears concerning the nature of social order, science, and marketing; and a somewhat astonishing approach to criticism of the broadened concept of marketing. We will respond to a few of the main issues raised there.

First, let us take up the central thrust of the article that distinguishes it from their repetition of the usual criticisms of the broadened concept: "the importance of social order in society," and its significant relation to language. No doubt language is important for social order, and for most anything else social. But it does not follow that therefore language must be precise and unambiguous. All language has varying degrees of ambiguity because denotations are always accompanied by connotations; and knowledge of the former differs among members of society and the latter can never have total consensus due to the variety of experiences within a society and between societies. Also, language changes constantly, the clarity of concepts is argued in all disciplines, except perhaps where—only temporarily—tradition, authority, and oppression manage to create a static situation by forbidding new ideas (the Church and Galileo), insisting on official ideology (Stalin and Lysenko), and other warnings of social danger. This is not to place "broadening" on such an august conceptual

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level, but to point to the need for intellectual freedom for all.

Language changes because ideas change and social orders change. The features cited by Laczniaak and Michie as prerequisite for social order have famous sponsors in Lawrence Frank and Talcott Parsons among others, but lack an important ingredient. Their ideas reflect the thinking of consensus-oriented sociologists and philosophers, and neglect the counterbalancing thinking about conflict and change as inevitable (and desirable?) mechanisms in social affairs.¹ In the main portion of the paper they make a blanket plea for stability with no allowance for social change, even an improved social order that may require some intervening social disorder. Toward the end, as a kind of afterthought, they retreat from their earlier position, and grant the necessity of some social change. We are glad that they modified their ideas toward sounding more reasonable; and perhaps with further thought and discussion they will come even closer to agreement with us. However, despite their urging that marketing take responsibility for these changes, their conclusion shows they clearly do not want them at all. Also, they give little realistic recognition of how social institutions are modified. They refer to adaptation and balance, but the adaptation seems mainly a criterion of efficiency, and the balance is another rigidity "fastened together in the long run by an iron law" which apparently threatens the intrepid marketing broadener. The language of the article overflows with "traditional conception," "institutional direction and control," "harmonious interaction," "the demand of law," sounding more like a political treatise than a scientific discussion of the validity of recent definitions of marketing. They fear increased regulation, and urge more of it themselves (e.g., a public review board to oversee broadened marketing, horrendous as that sounds).

Laczniaak and Michie are kind enough to deny that broadened marketing will "undermine the entire social fabric," for which we must be thankful; but they brought up that idea, too, and to be accused of the "potential to diminish social order and ultimately damage the reputation of the discipline of marketing," is no small matter, either. It smacks surprisingly of threats against the expression of ideas. In the November 9, 1978 issue of the *New York Review of Books*, the arrest warrant issued against the novelist Jiri Grusa by the Czech authorities reads

"Jiri Grusa. . . is accused of the crime of initiating disorder" (p. 35).

The rest may be commented upon summarily. As we have noted, the relationships among activities, ideas, and words, is in constant flux. As

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scientists we study these phenomena. Words are not forever defined precisely. Even the definition of marketing "sanctioned"(!) by the American Marketing Association of which Laczniak and Michie approve is not the same as the AMA definition that preceded it. Also, it is not precise and unambiguous as they claim. Does the definition refer to process or content? Like "exchange" the words "performance" and "direct" imply process; "business activities" and "goods and services" imply content. But how are these precise and unambiguous? Is there a list of the AMA-sanctioned businesses? There are clearly business activities that are illegal. Should they be allowed to be studied, even theoretically? Are there any goods and services that are excluded from this definition? The government is involved in the flow of goods and services. Business activities are involved in the raising of political campaign funds and paying for candidate's commercials, etc. Why then exclude the political arena from marketing attention—or pretend it isn't happening or that the people who are doing it are not marketers or are not practicing marketing? Like the U.S. Constitution, properly interpreted, even the AMA definition includes the broadened marketing concept.

At the outset,² we too referred to "marketing-like" activities. But it became necessary to give up that usage when it became apparent that there was no realistic difference between marketing activities and marketing-like activities. None of the attempts to distinguish business marketing and marketing in any other setting in a fundamental way hold water. The ground has been gone over elsewhere and will not be detailed here, other than to repeat that not even Samuelson is able to give a precise and unambiguous definition of economic goods that excludes anything that is being offered or received in human exchanges.

Laczniak and Michie struggle with this at one point by talking about the application of sophisticated marketing methods to the dissemination of ethically charged ideas such as neofascism, euthanasia, pornographic entertainment, gay rights and other controversial concepts. They mix up the two issues of whether such application *is* marketing in the first place, and whether responsible marketers should do it. Clearly, they think not, in both cases, warning marketers away from the "marketing of ideas." This is superficial reasoning. They do not seem to be aware that all products and services are "ethically charged," and that we are always "marketing an idea," whether it is the idea of Campbell's soup, Pinto cars or guns, drugs, abortions, or the promotion of X-rated films. These are all "traditional economic goods." Laczniak and Michie fail to recognize the basic issue,

that all individuals and organizations are inevitably marketing their goods, services and ideas, whether the marketing professionals choose to acknowledge that and assist it or not.

Another main area of misconception lies in the field of Venn diagrams, where anyone may play. Laczniaik and Michie depict marketing first as properly nestled away in Economics, Behavioral Science, and Law, with perhaps a touch less Mathematics than many would like to see. They contrast this with the megalomaniac picture of Imperial Marketing lordling it over all the other disciplines, and with just a handful of recent Ph.D.s to run the empire. Still, the second diagram is accurate in implying that marketing thinking and activity may be applied to all those other fields. What is not shown is that a similar diagram could be drawn for each of the fields of thought. Each field can be applied reciprocally to each other. There is a sociology of law and of theology, everyone uses mathematics, everything is either legal or illegal, political scientists may study power struggles in law, marketing or the church, and a good theologian knows that despite the separation of church and state God is everywhere. This is not "egotistic arrogance" but the recognition that any scholar may think "universally," in observing how his discipline permeates human activities. So there is law in marketing and marketing in and of law, aesthetics in marketing and marketing of aesthetics, education in marketing and marketing of education, and so forth. The broadened concept was merely calling attention to this fact that academic domains are conveniences and blinkered specializations; and as Laczniaik and Michie note, many marketing scholars have been glad to free themselves from this artificial limitation, and make themselves more useful to the social order.

It is an odd idea that marketing personnel who assist in the offering of the goods and services of which Laczniaik and Michie disapprove—or which are disapproved by any other groups in the society—are irresponsible. Marketing personnel who foster a "controversial and ultimately dysfunctional message" (whoever decides that?) are responsible as individuals who are willing to foster that cause and will suffer from the conflict with other groups, the government, etc., just as Kellogg's and Leo Burnett are suffering from opposition to their advertising of sugared cereals. Whether the first amendment protects or not has to be decided for anyone's message, not just sellers of "ideas." The idea of cigarettes is banned from broadcast media, but the sale of cigarettes is not banned.

The irony is that the broadened concept of marketing, rather than contributing to social disorder, is making an increasingly important contribu-

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tion to social order. Hospitals, colleges, social agencies, museums, churches, and other troubled social institutions are receiving the help of professional marketers to better understand their changing markets and take constructive steps to survive and grow. These nonbusiness institutions for many years operated without a sufficient sensitivity to market and consumer concerns and only now are becoming aware of the vital connection between their survival and their market-orientatedness.

Finally, it is unfortunate for marketing educators to foster a monolithic identification of marketing activities, one that means bad practices are generalized to all marketing. Too many people foolishly do that already. It makes no sense to say there will be evil consequences "if marketing denies responsibility for its action when problems and abuses occur." Marketing is not an entity, "it" has no collective responsibility. Everyone engages in it, perforce, and whatever else they may be, all exchanges are also marketing exchanges. Each conscience, in and out of tradition, controls its own responsibility. The "severe regulation" of marketing due to abuse is probably less likely to come about because of the conceptualization and application of marketing thought in broadened spheres than due to the unfortunate abuses that have plagued traditional marketing.

There is probably a limit to the social order that humans find acceptable, given the propensities to seek change, development, improvement, excitement, and novelty, and to create as well as to avoid complications. Marketers should not fear change, other disciplines, "society," or the power of their ideas. A higher concept of social order has to take account of the uses of disorder,³ the disturbances of tradition and of those complacently precise and unambiguous definitions that we hope will yield to the search for truth.

NOTES

¹Harold M. Hodges, Jr., *Conflict and Consensus*, Harper & Row, 1974; and Sidney J. Levy and Gerald Zaltman, *Marketing, Society, and Conflict*, Prentice-Hall, 1975.

²Phillip Kotler and Sidney J. Levy, "Broadening the Concept of Marketing," *Journal of Marketing*, January 1969.

³Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, Knopf, 1970.

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