



A Plea for Methodological Pluralism in Marketing Science: The Case of Non-profit Marketing Concept

Edouard V Novatorov*

Department of Management, National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Russia

*Corresponding author: Edouard V Novatorov, Professor, Department of management, National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Russia,

Tel: +7(812) 746-6623; E-mail: enova@mail.ru

Received date: July 18, 2014; Accepted date: July 29, 2014; Published date: August 07, 2014

Copyright: © 2014 Novatorov EV. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Abstract

The article suggests adopting a pluralism methodological approach in marketing science. Using controversy over marketing to nonmarketers problem paper traces evolution of the issue in context of research methodology and discusses alternative methodological approaches and research paradigms.

Keywords: Nonprofit marketing; Research methodology

Introduction

Marketing to nonmarketers controversy

Although the concept of marketing in the nonprofit and public sectors was initially criticized in the marketing literature as confusing [1,2], it eventually became widely embraced by marketing scholars and consultants [3]. Hastily Lovelock and Weinberg [4] noted that by the end of the 1970s there was no longer any serious controversy among marketing scholars about the appropriateness of the concept for the public and nonprofit sectors. However, despite this apparent agreement among marketing academics, public administrators and academics in public administration and nonprofit areas have not unanimously embraced the utility of the concept of non-profit and public sector marketing.

During the subsequent three decades the “marketing to nonmarketers” problem in the context of the public sector, has split public administrators into two camps comprised of its supporters and opponents. Thus, Roberto [5], an active proponent of marketing, observed: “Marketing’s recent and growing participation in public sector management has received a bipolar love-hate evaluation.”

Those commentators, who are critical of marketing, do partially recognize the need of public administrators to adopt new management techniques to deal with the prevailing environment of less-government-more-user-fees. However, they refer to the application of marketing principles within the nonprofit and public administration fields as “confusion compounded”, “an inappropriate model”, “intellectualization”, “absurd”, “the megalomaniac marketing supremacy syndrome”, and “a dramatic imitation” of social relationships [2,6-10]. The opponents’ position was perhaps best articulated by Walsh [11] who suggested the need to redefine public marketing “...if it is to be specifically public service marketing rather a pale imitation of a private sector approach within the public sector.”

In contrast to the position of marketing opponents, supportive commentators refer to its use as “a comprehensive strategy for effecting social change” with “unique concepts and techniques” which are “coming of age” and are merely “misunderstood” [4,5,12,13].

Ironically, the ultimate goal of marketing proponents was essentially the same as that of its opponents--to increase the effectiveness and responsiveness of public organizations in a changed financial environment. The essence of the difference in opinions appears to relate to the means by which this commonly recognized goal should be achieved.

The “marketing to nonmarketers” issue has wide geographic and disciplinary scope. It can be found in such diverse disciplines as political science, arts and culture, health promotion, fundraising, and nutrition education. The geography of the debates ranges from the Republics of the former Soviet Union, across Europe and Scandinavia, through North America, to New Zealand and Australia.

The major assumptions of this article is that “marketing to nonmarketers” problem emerged from controversial broadened marketing proposition and its authors used poor and ideologically biased reductionist methodology. The purpose of this article is to discuss and suggest alternative methodological paradigms to approach the problem.

Methodological issues in marketing science

An ongoing and pervasive debate among social scientists during the last two decades of the twentieth century has been taking place between naturalists, antinaturalists, critical theorists, and pluralists regarding the issue of how social phenomena should be studied [14]. Naturalists argue that the study of social and of natural phenomena should be approached in the same way using objectivist epistemology, ontological belief in realism, and experimental methodology. Antinaturalists disagree with naturalists, believing that differences between natural and social phenomena mandate that a different approach should be used to study social phenomena. Contrary to “hard” natural sciences, the “soft” social science approach should be based on subjectivist epistemology, relativist ontology, and qualitative methodology. Critical theorists partially agree with naturalists and antinaturalists, accepting naturalists’ methodology and antinaturalists’ subjectivity. At the same time, critical theorists partially disagree with naturalists’ and antinaturalists’ approaches, rejecting naturalists’ ontological beliefs in relativity of truth and naturalists’ epistemological belief in the objectivity of a researcher. Finally, pluralists advocate

equality of all approaches arguing that all these approaches have a right to co-exist because they are generating different types of knowledge, motivated by various research interests, and guided by distinct scientific ideals.

Different responses to the issue of how social phenomena should be studied have shaped alternative philosophical orientations in the contemporary philosophy of social science. These diverse philosophical orientations are founded on dissimilar assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of relationships between the knower and the known (epistemology), and approved ways to conduct investigations (methodology). Combinations of these ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions are often referred to as alternative research paradigms. Paradigms predetermine a specific approach to the study of social phenomena [15]. Four major research paradigms are widely recognized by researchers: (1) the logico-positivist/empiricist paradigm; (2) constructivism; (3) critical theory; and (4) the pluralist paradigm [15-18].

Logico-positivist/Empiricist paradigm

Advocates of the logico-positivist/empiricist paradigm, which Martin and McIntyre [14] identified as being derived from the naturalist approach, suggest that the study of social phenomena by social scientists should be approached in the same way as the study of natural phenomena are approached by those working in the natural sciences. They perceive the goals of science to be prediction, control, and nomological explanation. The task of the researcher is to uncover and formulate time-and-context free cause-effect laws, which are often expressed in rigorous mathematical terms. Although there are several schools of thoughts within the naturalistic approach (e.g. empiricism, falsificationism, postpositivism, etc.), there are common denominators among them. These include: (1) the ontological belief that apprehensible reality exists and is governed by invariant laws (realism); (2) the epistemological assumption that subjective values of the researcher can be excised from the research process through proper research design, sample choice, and validity and reliability checks (objectivism); and (3) the methodological approach that relies heavily on quantitative methods, statistical measures, and empirical verifications of propositional hypotheses (experimental methodology) [14,15,19,20].

Arndt [19] notes that although the origin of the naturalist approach is attributed to the French philosopher Auguste Comte who defended positivism as a scientific method, naturalism is part of the Anglo-American philosophy of science tradition. It is the most dominant orientation in modern American social science thought, which includes the park and recreation and the marketing fields [15,19]. This hegemony is maintained by pressures to conform through the narrow empiricist perspective which is characteristic of most Ph.D. programs; the prevalence of this model in most articles in major journals; preferred access to funding by proposals using this model; and the conservative approach adopted by promotion and tenure committees [15]. Arndt [19] noted that each new generation of researchers is "born into" the naturalist approach, rather than consciously selecting it, and if a dissident researcher decides to pursue a different approach then he or she would likely be condemned "... to suffer the slow burnout of never emerging from the journals' revision purgatories." In the marketing literature, the naturalist approach has been rigorously defended and advocated by Hunt [21].

Constructivism

A major tenet of the constructivist paradigm is a shift from the ontological belief that reality exists, that eternal laws, to the ontological assumption that reality is more or less, drive it comprised of informed multiple constructions held by social actors, and that these constructions are alterable. While Martin and McIntyre [14] refer to the constructivist orientation as an antinaturalist approach, Morrow and Brown [22] designate the same orientation as a humanistic orientation in the social sciences. Antinaturalists or humanists contend that there are substantial differences in the subject matter of the natural and social sciences, which demand there be different approaches to the study of social and natural phenomena. Antinaturalists deny nomological explanations and argue that causality, generalizations, predictions, and mathematical laws have little or no importance in the social sciences.

According to constructivists, social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful. They are shaped by the mental constructions that social actors hold and attach to them. Hence, the antinaturalist approach suggests that the goal of science should be unraveling, understanding and reconstructing the meanings held by individuals or groups (relativism) and the method of science should be interpretation (hermeneutics) from the point of view of the social actor (verstehen). Constructivism challenges the distinction between ontology and epistemology, assuming an interactive linkage of the researcher and the object of investigation (subjectivism) so that the findings of an inquiry are themselves a literal creation or construction of the inquiry process. Historical roots of constructivism derive from the literary interpretation and criticism of poets practiced in ancient Greece and the religious exegesis—an attempt to interpret disputed or hidden meanings of authoritative religious texts. Modern constructivism has been influenced by phenomenological and ethnomethodological traditions and has had a strong effect on European philosophy [14,18,23,24]. According to Monieson [9], in the marketing literature the constructivist orientation is rather underdeveloped and the hermeneutic ideal is only beginning to be appreciated [25].

Critical theory

Critical theory occupies a niche in social philosophy that is dissimilar to both the naturalist and the antinaturalist approaches. In terms of the nature of reality, it seems closer to positivism since it also accepts realism as an ontological belief. However, in terms of relationships between the knower and the known it leans closer to constructivism, since it also advocates subjectivist epistemology. At the same time, critical theory is distant from positivism, criticizing it for objectification of human subjects; and stays far away from constructivist relativism, arguing that social phenomena are a sociohistorical reality that have reified over time. In spite of these ontological and epistemological differences, critical theory to some extent depends on naturalistic and antinaturalistic methodologies, although they are used to attain different goals [16,26].

Critical theory rejects explanation as a scientific goal. Rather, the goal of critical science is to reveal anti-democratic oppressions, and to liberate humans from prejudices, ignorance, and ideologically frozen conceptions. To achieve these goals, critical theory employs a dialogic/dialectical methodology that attempts to understand the intersubjective meanings, values, and motives of social actors. It attempts to disclose contradictions in social structure caused by hegemony of dominant meanings that are enforced by ideology [27].

Critical theory rejects the positivistic 'objective' picture of social reality and cuts through surface appearances by locating social phenomena in specific historical contexts and by analyzing their inner interrelated relations. Similarly, critical theory goes one-step further than constructivism by studying action rather than behavior, and seeking change in addition to interpretation of meanings [28].

The historical roots of critical theory stem from the works of Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Saint-Simon, Weber, and Marx. The roots of modern critical theory stem from the works of a group of German scholars in the 1920s (Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse) who are commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School. In the 1960s, Jurgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens whose ideas have strongly influenced philosophers and social scientists in many countries including North America [29] radically revised postulates of the Frankfurt School. Three major contemporary academic journals: *Telos*, *Dissent*, and *Theory, Culture & Society*, are oriented towards publishing results of critical studies. In the marketing literature, the critical tradition seems weak and appears to be represented mainly by scholars with non-North American ethnic and cultural backgrounds [9,30].

Pluralist paradigm in marketing science: There is a perspective in the philosophy of social science that advocates a holistic and pluralist approach to conducting social science. This "multivaried" perspective stems from the arguments of some philosophers who believe that naturalistic, antinaturalistic, and critical theory approaches are compatible, complementary, and legitimate ways of studying social phenomena. They argue that none of these approaches should have a monopolistic hegemony on representing the ultimately correct science. They have to co-exist in a dialogical position of supplementing rather than competing with each other [16,17,24,31].

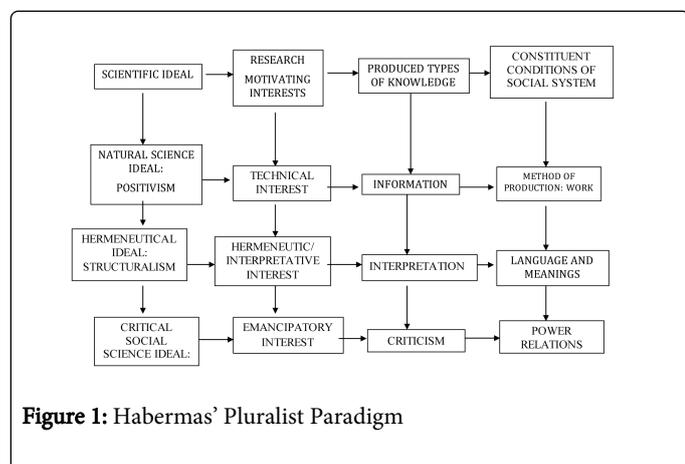


Figure 1: Habermas' Pluralist Paradigm

Israel's [31] discussion of Habermas' [32] complex philosophy is one of the best available in the English speaking literature for better understanding this pluralist perspective. It is summarized in Figure 1. Israel interprets Habermas as identifying three types of social scientific ideals: the natural science ideal, the hermeneutic ideal, and the ideal of a critical social science. These three types of scientific ideals have shaped three major research orientations: positivism, structuralism, and critical theory. Three different research interests that stimulate production of three different types of knowledge stimulate these three research orientations. Positivism produces the informative type of knowledge and is motivated mainly by technical interest; structuralism produces the interpretative type of knowledge and is motivated by hermeneutic/interpretative interest; finally, critical theory produces

criticism and is motivated by emancipatory interest. The three types of interests and three types of knowledge are targeted on three main media--work, language, and power--that, according to Habermas, are necessary for the maintenance of a social system (Figure 1). The major premise of the pluralist paradigm is that "all social acts should be understood from three different constituent conditions: language; the basic process of production by which 'nature is transformed;' and social power relations [31]".

In broad terms, the pluralist paradigm states that positivism (naturalist) approaches are effective for conducting social science. However, by focusing exclusively on question "What is truth and what is false?" causes this approach to ignore the role of values, which contributes to the conservation of existing social conditions. Therefore, there is a need to supplement this positivistic approach with critical social science, which uncovers and reveals dominant values by analyzing whether or not they are acceptable in the context of a healthy and democratic social system. However, to achieve this goal, critical social science, in its turn, should be accompanied by hermeneutics, which seek a deep and rich understanding of meanings held by social actors and to identify the ways in which these meanings influence their behavior [17].

Conclusion

In the marketing literature the pluralist tradition has been represented by the work of Monieson [9,33], and Arndt [19] whose philosophical orientation relies heavily on the work of Gutlung [17]. Pluralists seek to break free from the paradigmatic provincialism which they perceive characterizes current marketing science. To achieve this goal, advocates of pluralism suggest that: (1) the dominant naturalist approach in marketing should be diluted by adopting alternative research orientations such as criticism and constructivism [19,25]; (2) marketing scholars should practice their right to dissent, to understand, and to be simple [33]; (3) a diverse array of research paradigms to better reflect subjective experiences, values, criticism, and conflicts should be brought into marketing science [19]; and (4) different metaphors within alternative research paradigms (e.g. alienated man, victimized consumers, language and text, experienced man, irrational man, political economies, and the political marketplace) should be recognized by marketing scholars [19,31,34,35]. Although their approach has been debated [21], the voices of pluralists have ignited a philosophical rethinking both of general marketing theory and of the conceptualization of public and non-profit sectors marketing in the context of public and non-profit sectors management [11,36-38]. The main conclusion of this paper is that pluralist methodological approach will benefit and enrich both: the marketing science and non-profit field.

References

1. Luck D (1969) Broadening the Concept of marketing—Too Far. *J of Market* 33(3): 53-55.
2. Luck D (1974) Social marketing: Confusion compounded. *J of Market* 38(4): 70-72.
3. Nickels WG (1974). Conceptual Conflicts in marketing, *Journal of Economics and Business* 27(1):140-143.
4. Lovelock CH, Weinberg CB (1978) Public and nonprofit marketing comes of age. In Zaltman G, Bonoma T (Eds.), *Review of Marketing* 1978, IL: American Marketing Association, Chicago 413-452.

5. Roberto E (1991) Applying a marketing model in the public sector. In Fairchellaigh CO (1991) *Service delivery and public sector marketing*. Sydney: Macmillan & Co: 112-134.
6. Fairchellaigh C'O (1991), *Service delivery and public sector marketing* (112-134). Sydney: Macmillan & Co.
7. Arndt J (1978) How broad should the marketing concept be? *J of Market* 42(1): 101-103.
8. Capon N, Mauser G (1982) A review of nonprofit marketing texts. *Journal of Marketing* 46(3): 125-128.
9. Loveday P (1991) Public sector marketing: A critical appraisal. In O'Fairchellaigh, C, Graham, P., and Warburton, J. (Eds.), *Service delivery and public Sector marketing*. Sydney: Macmillan& Co, 173-177.
10. Monieson DD (1988) Intellectualization in macromarketing: A world disenchanted. *J of Macmarket*. 8(2): 24-36.
11. Vanden Heede A, Pelican S (1995) Reflections on marketing as an appropriate model for nutrition education. *J of Nutri Edu* 27(3): 141-150.
12. Walsh K (1994) Marketing and public Sector management. *Eur J of Market* 28(3): 63-71.
13. Leathar DS, Hastings GB (1987) Social marketing and health education. *J of Serv Market* 1(2): 49-52.
14. Hastings G, Haywood A (1991) Social marketing and communication in health promotion, *Health Promotion International*. 6(2):135-145.
15. Martin M, McIntyre LC (1997) *Reading in the philosophy of social science* (3rd ed.) Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press.
16. Guba EG, Lincoln YS (1994) Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Methodology*. Beverly Hills, C A: Sage Publications, 15-36.
17. Braybrooke D (1987) *Philosophy of social science*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
18. Gultung J (1990) Theory formation in social research: A plea for pluralism. In E. Oyen (Ed.), *Comparative methodology: Theory and practice in international social research*. London: Sage Publications 96-112.
19. Little D (1991) *Varieties of social explanation*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
20. Arndt J (1985) On making marketing science more scientific: The role of orientations, paradigms, metaphors, and puzzle solving. *J of Market* 49(3): 11-23.
21. Lincoln YS, Guba EG (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
22. Hunt SD (1983) General theories and the fundamental explanada of marketing. *J of Market* 47(4): 9-17.
23. Morrow RA, Brown DD (1994) *Critical theory and methodology*. London: Sage Publications.
24. Bleicher J (1980) *Contemporary hermeneutics*. London: Routlege and Kegan Paul.
25. Rabinow P, Sullivan W (1987) *Interpretive social science: A second look*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
26. Hirschman EC (1986) Humanistic inquiry in marketing research: Philosophy, method, and criteria. *J of Market Research* 23(3): 237-249.
27. Lakatos T, Musgrave A (1970) *Criticism and the growth of knowledge*. Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press.
28. Comstock DE (1997) A method for critical research. In M. Martin and L. C. McIntyre (Eds.) *Reading in the philosophy of social science*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 234-247.
29. Harvey L (1990) *Critical social research*. London: Unwin Hyman.
30. Fay B(1987) *Critical social science*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
31. Wish JR, Dholakia N, Rose S (1982). When Dr. Marx read Dr. Kotler: a dialectical look at American marketing. 1982 Marcomarketing Seminar abstracts. *J of Macromarketing*. 2(2): 85.
32. Israel J (1971) *Alienation: From Marx to modern sociology*. Boston: MA: Allyn & Bacon.
33. Habermas J (1967) *Theorie andpraxis. [Theory and Practice]* Neuwied: Luchterhand Verlag.
34. Monieson DD (1982) What constitutes usable knowledge in macromarketing? *J of Macromarketing*. 2(1): 14-22.
35. Arndt J (1981). The political economy of marketing Systems: Reviving the institutional approach. *J of Macromarketing*. 1(2): 36-47.
36. Pandya A, Dholakia N (1992) An institutional theory of exchange in marketing. *European J of Market* 26(12): 19-41.
37. Gummesson E (2002) *Qualitative Research in Marketing: Roadmap for a Wilderness of Complexity and Unpredictability*, *Europ J of Market*. 36(3):325-349.
38. Hunt SD (1994) On rethinking marketing: Our discipline, our practice, our methods. *Eur J of Market*, 28(3): 13-25.