

EXTENDING THE THINKABLE: CONSUMER RESEARCH FOR MARKETING PRACTICE

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Abstract

Representing users to producers is the subject of this paper -- the essential yet, outside of marketing practice, most overlooked aspect of marketing. It requires basic science that breaks new ground. As appropriate conceptualizations become available, chances improve that the producer's question: What shall we produce? will be answered more efficiently than heretofore. Consumer researchers are invited to create the behavioral science that marketing needs.

Introduction

A conference session devoted to our topic, "Whither ACR?", has to be an occasion for speakers to state their personal beliefs, wishes, dreams, perhaps, for the domain of scholarship that we share. Certainly, no panelist's answer to the question the topic poses can dictate the answer that actually unfolds over time. Collectively, the varied interests of individual members will see to that. Nor can the answer of any member predict the answer that unfolds over time. If it could, that would imply that we know now the full scope of our subject matter and much of the fun of our pursuit would have been taken from us. We might as well seek other lands to conquer. Our session is surely intended as background briefing, to promote communication that goes beyond the usual scope of scholarly papers. The call for papers for this conference noted that roughly 20% of the membership of the Association for Consumer Research is not affiliated with marketing. It gave me the idea that it might be in line with the our topic's spirit of communication if, as one who shares affiliation with the majority, I were to try to clarify for nonmarketers what it means to do consumer research for marketing practice.

Let me start by stating where I stand. There is no assignment anywhere in world of scholarship or science that I would choose over that of behavioral scientist in the service of the practice of marketing. My reasons reflect the janus-like feature of that assignment -- one face is turned to the world of everyday action in real time and the other to the world of representation, reflection, scientific understanding, and action-in-the-laboratory. Whichever face one considers, the work is important and not easy. There are urgent problems begging to be addressed and, everywhere, new ground to explore. My plan for this paper is to describe some of the tasks on each side of the gate but first I must review, for nonpractitioners, the nature of marketing as a business and societal function.

The Marketing Function

What it means to do consumer research for the practice of marketing flows from two features of producing goods/services: the need for an intermediary between users and producers, and for a survival strategy in a free market.

User-Producer Intermediary

When society opted for division of labor, it created the need for a function that would represent user-perspectives to producers. Adam Smith (1776/1961) brilliantly analyzed the reasons why division of labor enhances productive efficiency but he neglected to discuss an attendant problem. If I make coats for you and me, and you make bread for both of us, we may each become efficient at our tasks. But if I do not make for you the coat you would want to make for yourself, and you do not make for me the bread I would want to make for myself, then each of us is less well served than we would wish to be. As long as users and producers live in close proximity to each other, face-to-face communication may mitigate the disadvantages that flow from assigning the roles of user and producer to separate individuals. But in an era of mass manufacturing and mass communications

with its impersonal exchange-at-a-distance between producer and user, society needs an institution that is charged with regaining for users access to control over what is made in their name, which they forfeit to division of labor.

In assigning the task to marketing, society requires that marketers stand in the shoes of users, understand the influences that users experience, and act for the user. It follows directly from the notion of division of labor that goods/services have no claim on existence except as a response to the circumstances, psychological and nonpsychological, of prospective users. It is the marketer's role to ensure that the productive enterprise is brought in touch with the influences that users experience and is made to be, in effect, an extension of the user's mind and body.

Surviving Free Competition

The logic of viewing marketing as a societal function that division of labor makes necessary is independent of the nature of the economic system. Whether one has in mind a centrally planned economy or one that espouses free enterprise, division of labor means that individuals other than prospective users make the decisions about what is produced. In either case, the conditions that allocate people's energies to doing the things they do are the same conditions to which producers must be responsive if they are to assist people in achieving their ends. A centrally planned economy seems to lack a built-in mechanism for giving effect to user-perspectives. People may choose not to use some or all of the output that central planners provide but, in a closed economy, they have only two means of recourse -- become their own producers or go without. Neither option is likely to bring pressure to bear that would make planners more responsive to users' wishes. In a closed system, to ensure a productive output that is responsive to users' wants, it would be necessary deliberately to design a mechanism that leads to unpleasant consequences for planners when users remain unsatisfied. In a free enterprise economy, the marketplace performs precisely such a function by penalizing producers whose offerings users find to be less than desirable or useful, relative to the competition. Who is more likely to succeed -- producers who try to make people buy what the producer "happens" to make or their competitors who first find out what is wanted and then make that available? Accordingly, what reflection finds to be implicit in division of labor namely, that output ought to mirror users' wants becomes, under conditions of competition, a means of survival for producers. The argument from division of labor suggests that logic requires society to find a way to reestablish user-producer communication, which division of labor severs. The argument from competition sees reestablishing that communicative link as the producer's strategy for survival. Both arguments give similar direction to the behavioral scientist: Marketers need a model of the naturally-occurring process of want-satisfaction i.e., of an interrole exchange that occurs within an individual who is both user and producer (Fennell 1985c).

What Do Marketers Do?

From the preceding view of its nature, it follows that marketing is the function that is primarily responsible for what is produced. Marketing works collaboratively with other specialties on aspects of how the firm's offerings are produced, in the sense of which technology, raw materials, and costs, but it is for marketing to answer producers' substantive question: Within the general domain of our expertise, to which real-world circumstances, psychological and nonpsychological, shall we respond with a productive output? Indeed, to be responsible for that decision is marketing's unique contribution to the firm. No other department may legitimately claim to compete for that turf. No other department is charged with, or equipped for, the

responsibility of representing the perspectives of users. Or, more accurately stated, the characteristics of contexts of use. It follows that much of the content of the humanly designed environment is marketing's responsibility. It is there because marketing reported that contexts of use existed in the lives of some people that required the production of a certain kind of good/service. Or, if marketing did not so report, it allowed others so to claim, without offering effective challenge, thus yielding the marketing function to individuals outside the marketing profession. In either event, what exists is marketing's responsibility.

Accordingly, on the one hand marketing claims credit for: relief from fatigue, pain, drudgery, monotony, discomfort, anxiety, dirt, hunger, thirst, body odors, cold, heat, decay, mold, mildew, and ravages of the elements; provision of fun, intellectual stimulation, fascination, and play; provision of pleasures for every sense; in other words, for all the easements and enjoyments that flow from the availability of goods/services; and, on the other hand, accepts blame for the potential for irritation, hurt, and harm that inheres in any capability that is provided for human use.

Producers must also have an eye to the background conditions of today's productive arrangements. Mass manufacturing and mass media of communication lead to a user-producer transaction that is conducted largely in public and, willy nilly, people become exposed to wants beyond those that had arisen in the circumstances of their own lives. Not only physical contact with goods/services may help or hurt people but also the information contained in the public display, or announcements of availability for sale, of goods/services. Producers need the marketing function to guide their response to the wants of prospective users. They also need it to assess likely side effects of exposure to goods/services and to information about their availability. Included here are effects on people other than those whom the producer intends to serve, e.g., effects on nontargets and nonprospects who, without seeking it, may be exposed to the firm's offerings, directly or symbolically, as well as effects of using the goods/services in nontargeted ways.

Let me be specific about the nature of the marketing function. When the government uses society's resources to introduce a new coin that it must later withdraw from circulation because of popular rejection, that is an example of a failure to employ the marketing function. When goods/services are transplanted from one culture where they have been safely used to another where the frequency of misuse and harmful consequences rises dramatically, that is an example of a failure to employ the marketing function. When a new generation of computer software is promoted as "user friendly," that is an example of failure to employ the marketing function initially. When medicines are sold in nontamperproof packaging so that a capsule for treating minor pain may be used as a lethal weapon, that is an example of a failure to employ the marketing function. In all these cases, the problem traces to a failure to ensure that top management understands the nature of marketing's task and uses its contribution. In the previous examples, where were the representations of and empirical data on: (1) The relevant behavioral domains for which the various offerings were intended, and (2) The wider context in which the offerings' availability would be announced and their use would occur? These questions touch on what is both the least visible side of marketing and its essence. Marketing's essential function involves three stages of communicative flow between users and producers (Fennell 1985b), starting with information flowing (1) from prospects to producers, then (2) from producers to targets, in the possible presence of nontargets and nonprospects, and (3) from targets and triers to producers. The first stage comprises the core assignment of representing users' circumstances to producers. It is largely concerned with describing users' worlds i.e., the psychological and nonpsychological contexts in which goods/services will be used. As regards conceptual development, it is the most neglected of the three, understandably, since it implicates hitherto intractable issues that touch the very essence of human nature. The rest of this paper deals with some aspects of the task of representing users to producers: A. Describing lived worlds;

B. Models for marketing's descriptive task; and C. Interdisciplinary collaboration. In each case, I first describe marketing's needs; then the opportunities that await researchers who would break new ground, in the real world no less than in the world of scholarship and science.

A. Describing Lived Worlds

As intermediary between user and producer, marketers make decisions about what to produce for whom in which contexts, and what to communicate, when and where. The task involves describing aspects of peoples' lives in certain regions of space (e.g., United States), and time (e.g., twelve month period). To grasp marketing's difficulty, one need only recall that marketers are attempting to answer the monumental question: What do people want? and to do so with specificity sufficient to permit a producer to choose the physical and psychological attributes of a good/service.

Over the years, marketers have relied heavily on common sense, intuition, and professional experience in approaching the task of describing the world of prospective users. They usually gain entry to that world by first defining a focal behavioral domain (e.g., doing household chores), and then interviewing people who perform one or more activities in that domain. Many years ago, marketing practitioners discovered that asking people to describe the kind of goods/services that they would like to see available rarely produces good information. It is more productive to ask people to describe the internal and external context for an activity in which the marketer is interested. With regard to a focal activity, the marketer tries to obtain information such as: what people believe, know from experience, and feel (i.e., like and dislike), the sensations they experience, the information they possess, the behavioral routines they follow in which contexts of space and time. Depending on the exigencies of a particular project, researchers may obtain qualitative information only or, sometimes in surveys of considerable scope, may quantify the information that they had obtained through qualitative research. At the present time, the resulting descriptions of everyday activities are primarily in the proprietary domain. The time is long past due for the significance of this aspect of the practitioner's task to be appreciated outside of marketing, to the benefit of practice and science both.

Description is one of the classic components of scientific method along with explanation, prediction, and control. Yet, in the mainstream of philosophic reflection on scientific method, it has been largely overlooked, in comparison with the attention philosophers of science have accorded to the other three. Similarly, or perhaps as a consequence, in the disciplines of psychology and marketing, some of us seem to equate "doing science" with explaining, predicting, and controlling. In the case of the various natural sciences, scientists in well-established fields see to it that needed description gets done, with or without critical reflection. Not so, in mainstream psychology and marketing where absence of reflective commentary on description goes hand in hand with neglecting to describe the discipline's subject matter. Marketing practice has suffered in a number of ways, which I have described elsewhere (Fennell 1985a). My focus here is on opportunities, of which I mention three: (1) With the interest and support of consumer researchers, we may look to the accumulation of systematic information, in the public arena, about the major behavioral domains of everyday lives, and we shall thus begin to remedy behavioral science's longstanding failure to undertake the systematic description of its subject matter. Imagine how much more we should know about behavior if, for a universe of individuals in some region of space and time, we were to describe and publish the internal and external contexts for all occasions of one activity. And then, of one more, and then another. Consumer researchers who may be interested in embarking on such a descriptive task, would be well-advised to first become acquainted with the major scholarly tradition that has offered critical reflection on the subject of description, namely phenomenology, which brings me to the second opportunity: (2) Let us develop a well-rounded portrayal of the nature of science that includes description as a full member deserving of phi

mental context, and task or hobby orientation. Given an interest in action, theorists sample the behavioral universe in a different way. They focus on one or a few activities and, in a given region of space, summarize across individuals, with accompanying variation in the external and internal context for action. Focusing on persons: (1) Leads to using concepts whose scope is too wide for the reach of individual products, and (2) Gets in the way of seeing behavioral determinants that are specific to individual acts -- the focus marketers need in order to try to participate in the ongoing actions of prospective users. If one's primary interest is studying persons -- certainly a significant pursuit on many grounds -- one is likely to seek and find behavioral explanations in attributes of persons e.g., traits, values, needs. In scope, such concepts are poorly adapted to the marketer's task and they distract one from looking where marketers need to look.

Motivation. In the case of personality, marketing's problem traces to the presence of a long-standing fascination with a particular concept. In the case of motivation, absence is the problem. In western culture the concept of motivation, as marketers need to construe motivation, has been singularly underdeveloped. Since Aristotle distinguished final from other kinds of cause, neither science nor philosophy has made much progress in understanding motivation. In this respect, psychology has been no more successful than has philosophy, where motivation arises for discussion in the context of philosophers' work on action, and where its scant treatment is, at least, lamented (e.g., Von Cranach & Harre 1982 p. 393).

The reasons for motivation's neglect are likely profound. They may implicate the boundary conditions of self-awareness that affect scholars and scientists, no less than other humans and most acutely, perhaps, in regard to the process that directs the allocation of one's resources. Consider the previous discussion of activating change -- a change in the relationship between the person and the environment that may bring to the fore some feature of the pre-change state that had not been salient. Individuals may, of course, deliberately reflect on the conditions that have just redirected their attention but the more usual pattern may be to proceed immediately to taking corrective action or, when the individual is in fairly unfamiliar circumstances, to constructing and reflecting on possible courses of action. From the standpoint of survival, it seems to make sense that the human capacity for reflection and analysis should come into play after, rather than during, the time when individuals are experiencing conditions that allocate their resources to effecting counterchange. A resource-allocating mechanism that errs on the side of taking countermeasures more often than is necessary is preferable to one that errs by subjecting every hint of possible danger to self-monitoring reflection.

The reason for motivation's neglect may be yet more subtle. It may lie in the notion that the "standpoint from which commentary is made must always be one remove from experience, and cannot have attention focussed upon it" (Harre & Secord 1972 p. 91). We cannot scrutinize that with which scrutiny is performed. In the case of motivation, the operative "scrutinizer" is the standard by which we judge whether what we are experiencing can be allowed to continue without our taking countermeasures, or whether things have reached a point where we must allocate resources to making adjustment.* But what is the nature of this scrutinizer? To be able to interrupt whatever is receiving our focal attention, the scrutinizer must be set to operate automatically. Since the most we can hope for is to learn about our scrutinizers inferentially, it may be no wonder that motivation is the aspect of our being that is most mysterious. There may, then, be very good reasons, intimately bound up

*In using the word "scrutinizer" to refer to affective reactions, as I am doing here, I depart from the cognitive context in which the authors used it (Harre & Secord 1972, p. 91). Thinking of affective reactions as a form of commentary adds a significant dimension to discussion of the limits to self-awareness.

with the limits of our capacities as conscious self-monitors, why insight into the conditions of our activation is hard to come by, whether at the level of everyday experience or of formal study. Monitoring others of our species is one way we may try to compensate for these limits, an interesting extension of which is the special case of monitoring what psychologists do when they want to allocate the resources of their animal subjects. For example, students of instrumental learning may arrange things so that the resources of some rats are allocated to escaping from a source of aversive stimulation, or to avoiding its likely occurrence. They may then proceed to study change, over time, in the rats' escaping or avoiding actions. If we assemble the major kinds of conditions that students of instrumental learning use to allocate the resources of their experimental animals, we may have at least the rudiments of a model of basic kinds of motivating conditions (Fennell 1980; Michael 1982, in preparation). Collectively, these conditions help us to appreciate how environmental and personal variables combine to allocate resources and to specify the domain of action. They may begin to give us a new perspective on the mystery of our scrutinizers.

C. Collaborating for Marketing's Descriptive Task

When individuals are both producer and user, they may adjust what they produce until it yields results approaching those that their personal scrutinizers demand. People may do this without being able to communicate much about their personal scrutinizers. When the user and producer roles no longer reside in the same individual, producers are being asked to create goods/services that are responsive to those most intimate scrutinizers of prospective users. Accordingly, while we should push to its limits whatever help marketing may find in prospective users' descriptions of the context for their actions, there is good reason for not relying solely on that source of information. Minimally, researchers should use comprehensive models to guide prospective users' through the full range of possibly relevant terrain. But, for marketers to do their job, the obvious limits to what the layperson knows about the environmental conditions of one's activation must be overcome. In trying to understand the nature of activating conditions i.e., of events that both raise the question of taking action and shed light on what needs to be done, marketers seek information that experts in the human environment can provide.

Consider a well-established product such as dentifrice, and the behavioral domain of oral hygiene routines. Over time, the range of brands that has come on the market represents a growing understanding, on the part of producers collectively, of the personal and environmental conditions that may allocate people's resources to oral hygiene in the form of teeth brushing. The range of brands points to the variety of considerations that may be found in a universe of adult men and women, comprising beliefs about: the process of dental decay (e.g., food particles remaining in the mouth, bacteria, plaque, tartar), and staining (e.g., tobacco); the consideration we owe to each other in avoiding mouth odor; what is, or what is regarded as, beautiful (e.g., white teeth, or pearl-like teeth); and many others.

Eventually, marketing planners will use models of action to generate a comprehensive set of such personal and environmental elements. For interested consumer researchers, the field is wide open to develop the models marketing needs. The models have to be stated at a level of abstraction that permits marketing planners to use them in any domain of substantive interest. Considering activating change, for example, personal and environmental variables combine to allocate an individual's resources to effecting counterchange. A general model of action must allow for any aspect of the person e.g., sensation, feeling, belief, rules, information, imagination, to combine with environmental events in producing behavioral activation. (Which class of environmental events a researcher should consider is a difficult question to answer in principle. Fortunately, it need not detain us in the context of marketing practice, where it is answered on a pragmatic basis. Marketers select a substantive domain that roughly corresponds to one or more existing products within the range of the producer's

strive for probabilistic accuracy at the level of incidence within a universe of interest.

Modeling the Focal Universe

In basic research, when scientists study a general process i.e., one assumed to exist in a wide variety of contexts, the act of selecting the particular substantive domain in which the process is studied may receive scant attention, possibly on the assumption that substantive domains are interchangeable. In the real world of marketing practice, the choice of substantive domain is a major facet of any planning assignment.

There are a number of distinct aspects to the definition of a domain of substantive interest. The first is the domain of environmental impact — the particular kind of change one intends to effect e.g., remove soil from clothes, or beard from face, or administer a fast-acting, lethal injury (e.g., to pests or sport animals). Typically, there are multiple ways for achieving such effects and producers tend to specialize in a small number of the relevant technologies (e.g., laundry detergents or dry cleaning; electric or wet shave; fire arms, or archery equipment, or chemicals). Second, there is what I have called elsewhere the focal behavioral domain — a domain of experience and action that corresponds to the producer's domain of expertise. Since actions are performed by individuals and take place in space and time, it becomes necessary to specify a universe of person-activity occasions — which actions performed by which individuals in which space/time environments are of interest to the producer (Fennell 1982). Space, time, and human beings are multidimensional, and the task of specification is complex.

Modeling the Nonfocal Universe

At any one time the producer's response to the circumstances of prospective users is highly selective and narrowly-focused. It is directed not only to a limited number of people in a naturally-occurring population but to a narrow band of the activities of those individuals. Producers do not, however, make available their productive output and information about that output in a vacuum but place their output, actually and symbolically, in public view in a world that consists of ontargets, and nonprospects, as well as targets. To help assess likelihood of unintended harm, producers need models of the nonfocal universe.

The task is relatively straightforward, to the extent that the nonfocal universe is specified by exclusion in the course of defining the focal universe. In principle, marketing planners can review the nature of proposed goods/services and accompanying messages in the context of the various kinds of activity, individuals, occasions of use, and periods of time that planners excluded when they defined the focal universe (Fennell, in press). The sheer enormity of such an undertaking is intimidating, but we must not allow the task's dimensions to get in the way of acknowledging that the kind of background conditions in which marketing operates today implicates such a task. Remote transactions between users and producers that are conducted largely in public involve, of necessity, people other than the immediate parties to the user-producer transaction.

Is Help Available for Marketing's Modeling Needs?

When we turn to behavioral science for help, we do not find models of the kind just described — of the antecedents of individual action and of the focal and nonfocal universes. For example, mainstream psychology has not produced a major body of work, conceptual or empirical, that addresses the modeling of action. Indeed, it is philosophers rather than psychologists who are responsible for the bulk of scholarly work in the domain of conceptualizing action.

Considering a behavioral episode of change-counterchange as in Figure 1, much of psychology's work has been concerned with events in the realm of counterchange. One example is the large body of work that addresses the act of choosing — among objects or alternative courses of action. Existing

models of choice belong in the realm of counterchange. In the typical research paradigm, individuals are presented with a set of options among which they are asked to choose. Usually, the researcher attempts to explain choice as a function of what are referred to as cognitive and affective variables e.g., expectations and utilities, or beliefs and importances. Because researchers do not establish a systematic connection between the presented options and conditions that affect the subjects, the paradigm is not relevant to the essential marketing assignment. By excluding consideration of the domain upstream from utility i.e., the conditions that imbue objects/courses of action with value in specific instances ("change" in Figure 1), researchers are unable to examine the extent to which their options reflect conditions that are operative for the subjects.

In much of mainstream psychology, researchers study the reactions of humans to stimuli, with little attention given to establishing the systematic status of the attributes of the stimulus. Consider the classic stimulus-response (S-R) paradigm. In the literatures of marketing and consumer behavior, authors sometimes speak of a brand, or an advertisement, as S, and purchase or use of a brand as R, which is a construction of S-R events as elements of counterchange. By excluding the context that gives meaning to S and R i.e., activating change, the practice is doomed to vacuity from the start. Events that are relevant to counterchange are understandable only in the context of activating change, which is also the context in light of which marketers would want to choose the attributes of their brands and the corresponding claims that they make in their ads.

The interests of many psychologists appear to lie in research domains where the attributes of stimuli are determined by variables that are outside the system of interest. The attitude-change literature is a prime example in this vein. Its thrust is to study possibilities for changing some aspect of human response to given "stimulus objects." The task of marketing is exactly the opposite. It is to create "stimulus objects" with attributes that are adapted to conditions that humans experience. For marketers, the attributes of such conditions are given, and the attributes of the stimulus — the brand or "attitude object" — are variable. Such is the behavioral meaning of the marketing concept: "Don't sell what you happen to make; make what the customer wants to buy." Or, to put it in terms of a behavioral episode: Marketers accept the attributes of activating change as given. They must identify such attributes to help producers to devise means for effecting counterchange.

A similar comment applies to the domain of information processing, much heralded for its supposed rejection of the mangle of stimulus-response psychology. In cognitive psychology, the dependent variable may have changed from overt response to various kinds of cognitive response but, from the present perspective, the essential stimulus-response paradigm remains in place. The conceptual sway of the stimulus-response paradigm will be broken only when researchers dislodge the influence of reflex arc thinking by substituting a behavioral episode of change-counterchange, and attempt to show a systematic link between attributes of activating change and subsequent S-R events.

It is of interest to ask why it should be that the needs of marketing practice focus attention on a view of human behavior that appears to have been neglected in mainstream psychology. Or, why is it that psychologists appear to have focused on events having to do with counterchange while neglecting to conceptualize activating change, perhaps failing to realize that what they have been focusing on is counterchange? "Personality" and "motivational" considerations are two among possibly numerous reasons.

Personality. In western culture, the tradition is well-entrenched of focusing on the person as an entity of intellectual and moral interest. Psychologists do not escape sharing in that tradition. Interest in persons as objects of study seems to have been antithetical to focusing on action. Describing persons implies summarizing across all of the different activities an individual engages in, with accompanying variation in the individual's role, environ-

mental context, and task or hobby orientation. Given an interest in action, theorists sample the behavioral universe in a different way. They focus on one or a few activities and, in a given region of space, summarize across individuals, with accompanying variation in the external and internal context for action. Focusing on persons: (1) Leads to using concepts whose scope is too wide for the reach of individual products, and (2) Gets in the way of seeing behavioral determinants that are specific to individual acts — the focus marketers need in order to try to participate in the ongoing actions of prospective users. If one's primary interest is studying persons — certainly a significant pursuit on many grounds — one is likely to seek and find behavioral explanations in attributes of persons e.g., traits, values, needs. In scope, such concepts are poorly adapted to the marketer's task and they distract one from looking where marketers need to look.

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with the limits of our capacities as conscious self-monitors, why insight into the conditions of our activation is hard to come by, whether at the level of everyday experience or of formal study. Monitoring others of our species is one way we may try to compensate for these limits, an interesting extension of which is the special case of monitoring what psychologists do when they want to allocate the resources of their animal subjects. For example, students of instrumental learning may arrange things so that the resources of some rats are allocated to escaping from a source of aversive stimulation, or to avoiding its likely occurrence. They may then proceed to study change, over time, in the rats' escaping or avoiding actions. If we assemble the major kinds of conditions that students of instrumental learning use to allocate the resources of their experimental animals, we may have at least the rudiments of a model of basic kinds of motivating conditions (Fennell 1980; Michael 1982, in preparation). Collectively, these conditions help us to appreciate how environmental and personal variables combine to allocate resources and to specify the domain of action. They may begin to give us a new perspective on the mystery of our scrutinizers.

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Consider a well-established product such as dentifrice, and the behavioral domain of oral hygiene routines. Over time, the range of brands that has come on the market represents a growing understanding, on the part of producers collectively, of the personal and environmental conditions that may allocate people's resources to oral hygiene in the form of teeth brushing. The range of brands points to the variety of considerations that may be found in a universe of adult men and women, comprising beliefs about: the process of dental decay (e.g., food particles remaining in the mouth, bacteria, plaque, tartar), and staining (e.g., tobacco); the consideration we owe to each other in avoiding mouth odor; what is, or what is regarded as, beautiful (e.g., white teeth, or pearl-like teeth); and many others.

Eventually, marketing planners will use models of action to generate a comprehensive set of such personal and environmental elements. For interested consumer researchers, the field is wide open to develop the models marketing needs. The models have to be stated at a level of abstraction that permits marketing planners to use them in any domain of substantive interest. Considering activating change, for example, personal and environmental variables combine to allocate an individual's resources to effecting counterchange. A general model of action must allow for any aspect of the person e.g., sensation, feeling, belief, rules, information, imagination, to combine with environmental events in producing behavioral activation. (Which class of environmental events a researcher should consider is a difficult question to answer in principle. Fortunately, it need not detain us in the context of marketing practice, where it is answered on a pragmatic basis. Marketers select a substantive domain that roughly corresponds to one or more existing products within the range of the producer's

*In using the word "scrutinizer" to refer to affective reactions, as I am doing here, I depart from the cognitive context in which the authors used it (Harre & Secord 1972, p. 91). Thinking of affective reactions as a form of commentary adds a significant dimension to discussion of the limits to self-awareness.

expertise e.g., products for cleansing teeth and gums). It is marketing's responsibility to obtain the collaboration of experts in appropriate realms of nonpsychological knowledge so that together they may spell out, for subsequent investigation, the real-world conditions that prospective users may be experiencing.

Collaboration between marketing and production management, including R&D, is fostered by enlightened producers of goods/services but, in the absence of models of the kind to which I refer, it does not, and cannot, proceed systematically nor can marketing readily assume leadership in such collaboration. For example, (1) Excessive attention may accrue to a candidate brand concept due to the political status of its source, to the total disregard of the idea's objective worth as measured by relevance to any existing aspect of prospects' worlds. Comprehensive models are, perhaps, the only effective means of ensuring that such privileged ideas are placed in the context of numerous competing alternatives. (2) Models would make it easier than it now is for marketing to communicate the nature of its function to production management, and within the firm generally. Nominally, top management understands that marketing represents user-wants, but what does a user-want look like? What do marketers have to bring to the conference table that gives flesh and substance to their role? If marketers were able to be articulate about the conditions that allocate prospects' resources, to which it is production management's job to be responsive, they would have something to say that top management is waiting to hear. They would be seen to give effect to their mission as users' emissaries to producers. (3) More specifically, at meetings with production management, marketers would assume their proper leadership role. They would be equipped to: a. Outline a comprehensive range of conditions that may be operative within the focal universe; b. Ask production management to specify in detail the possibly operative kinds of nonpsychological conditions corresponding to categories that marketing's general models specify; c. Initiate collaboration with production management in specifying the kinds of conditions that may result from the combined operation of psychological and nonpsychological elements; d. Proceed to study each of these theoretically specified options, identifying whether gaps exist in the firm's information about the physical or the behavioral realm, and directing investigations accordingly. Comprehensive models permit planning such as I describe which, in turn, permits the role of each of marketing's diverse kinds of research project to be clearly visible. As members of the planning team grasp the big picture, and the potential contribution of each piece of empirical work in the context of the big picture, the actual yield of relevant information improves.

Consumer Research at the Frontier

Given today's technological sophistication, there is nothing easier than producing vast quantities of goods/services. The first milestone on the way to a new frontier is recognizing that mere production warrants no accolades. The contribution that society demands from its productive enterprise is not simply to produce but to produce the right goods/services. Therein lie problems and opportunities aplenty. First, the fact that producers may not know what the "right" productive decisions are does not prevent goods from being produced. Second, all of us have an interest in the kinds of things that get produced, announced in our communications media, displayed in our stores, used by our neighbors and ourselves, and disposed of in our dumps. As individual consumers, many of us feel, perhaps wrongly, that there is little we can do to influence the kinds of things that get produced. As marketing practitioners, the kinds of things that get produced are our responsibility. Within law and ethics, it is our assignment to see to it that what gets produced is what users of goods/services would make for themselves. Third, as consumer researchers, we could have much more to say than we do now, if we would take the action that is ours to take namely, develop the conceptual tools that help marketers effectively represent user-circumstances to producers. Fourth, as marketers and as consumer researchers, if we do not do our job, others will do it, and are doing it. Decisions are made and goods

services are produced, with or without our input.

So, there is a job that needs to be done, that is being done, that many people would like to have a say in doing, that is marketing's responsibility, that consumer researchers may take as their interest and responsibility. It is located at the frontier of the realm that science and scholarship have made their own. What more could anyone ask for, measured by yardsticks of intellectual challenge and importance to society? In the decade of the 1920s, "rationalization of production" was much in vogue. The phrase referred to introducing more efficient, streamlined, methods of production and to the replacement of human labor by machines. The process of deciding what shall be produced has not yet benefited from rationalization. Instead, it is characterized by bumbling, chaos, and colossal waste that make the era of prerationalized methods of production seem serenely ordered. It does not have to be this way. But the best hope for order are consumer researchers ready to study the essential marketing task. Those who do will not only serve marketing, and the public at large. They will extend the boundaries of what is thinkable, both for the nature of our productive enterprise and for behavioral science. If ever a task needed the help of basic science, it is society's charge to marketing to represent users to producers. If ever a task was at the frontier of knowledge, close to human hearts, and at the center of human mystery, it is that of consumer researcher for marketing practice.

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