

Generic Concept of Marketing and The Implications for Marketing Research

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Abstract : *The debate on the broadened concept of marketing has been ongoing since the 1960s. This conceptual review explores the marketing concept and its implications for marketing research. It examines the seminal article by Kotler and Levy, who argued for a broadened conceptual domain of marketing and defined it as a pervasive societal activity that goes beyond the selling of products. This article also examines the previous scholarly counter-arguments, which criticized the idea of extending marketing to non-business activities. The debate centers around the question of whether marketing should take on a broader social meaning or remain a narrowly defined business activity. This article analyzes the implications of the broadened marketing concept for marketing research. It ultimately highlights the importance of identifying marketing problems and their solutions and promoting efficient, responsive marketing while acknowledging the societal role of marketing. The analysis concludes that while the definition of marketing may be broadened, it is essential to maintain a clear and specific criterion relating marketing activities to buying and selling products and services.*

Keywords : *broadened marketing, generic concept of marketing, Kotler & Levy, marketing myopia, societal marketing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Marketing is an essential function of every organization, whether a business enterprise or a non-profit organization. It involves a range of activities that go beyond just selling products and services to customers. The definition of marketing has evolved over the years, and scholars and practitioners have had different views on what constitutes marketing. One of the most significant debates on the definition of marketing occurred in 1969 when Philip Kotler and Sidney Levy published an article titled "Broadening the Concept of Marketing" in the Journal of Marketing. This article challenged the traditional definition of marketing and sparked a debate regarding whether marketing should be narrowly defined as a business activity or whether it should encompass a broader social meaning.

II. KOTLER AND LEVY'S ARGUMENTS FOR BROADENING THE CONCEPT OF MARKETING

In January 1969, a wide definition of marketing was defined by Kotler and Levy in Broadening the Concept of Marketing, published in the Journal of Marketing. Kotler and Levy argued for a dramatically broadened conceptual domain of marketing, and they defined the term marketing as "a pervasive societal activity that goes considerably beyond the selling of toothpaste, soap, and steel" (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p.10). Kotler and Levy argued that the modern marketing concept serves very naturally to describe an essential facet of all organizational activity. All organizations must develop appropriate products to serve their diverse consumer groups and use modern communication tools to reach their consumer public. They interpreted the meaning of marketing for nonbusiness and the nature of marketing functions such as product improvement, pricing, distribution, and communication in such organizations. Furthermore, Kotler and Levy questioned whether traditional marketing principles are transferable to the marketing of organizations, persons, and ideas, implying that; "the business heritage of marketing provides a useful set of concepts for guiding all organizations. The choice facing those who manage non-business organizations is not whether to market, for no organization can avoid marketing. The choice is whether to do it well or poorly" (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p.15). Kotler and Levy stated that nonbusiness organizations have an increasing range of influence, affect as many livelihoods, and

occupy as much media prominence as significant business firms. They declared that when it comes to the they marketing function, “it is also clear that every organization performs marketing-like activities whether or not are recognized as such” (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p.11). They supported their side with several examples, such as the police department campaigning to “win friends and influence people,” the Museum of Art broadening its appeal through “happenings,” or the public school system by developing new teaching techniques and enriching children. The main question being tried to be answered by these and other authors’ debates is whether marketing will either take on a broader social meaning or remain a narrowly defined business activity.

III. CRITICISMS OF THE BROADENED MARKETING CONCEPT

As a retort to Kotler and Levy’s opinions, Luck criticized reflections on the social contributions of marketing and affirmed business enterprise’s social role for marketing in “Broadening the Concept of Marketing – Too Far in July 1969. He found Kotler and Levy’s article intriguing, imaginative, and also based on premises that may lead to confusion regarding the essential nature of marketing. Luck (1969) stated that their main thesis is that the “concept” of marketing is too limited because it excludes marketing in nonbusiness activities. They complain that marketing is “a narrowly defined business activity” whose non-business usage has not been incorporated “in the body of marketing thought and theory.” They seem to be asking that marketing be redefined, but they do not offer any explicit, new definition of marketing. Also, Luck notes that it should be recognized that the marketing profession did not originate most of the concepts noted by Kotler and Levy. “If one has tried to explain to someone the nature of marketing, with presented limited definition, he will have found it difficult. Attenuate marketing’s definition to make it almost universal and it will wholly lose its identity” (Luck, 1969, p.53-54). In Luck’s terms, marketing concerns markets, which must be characterized by buying and selling. “By employing a firm, specific criterion in marketing’s definition - that of the ultimate purchase-and-sale of a product or service – the vagueness and open-endedness of Kotler and Levy’s “concept” is avoided. Thus, a particular act must be related to an eventual or intended offer to buy and/or sell a specified good or service – with the terms of sale specified between the parties – or that act is not a marketing act, regardless of its nature” (Luck, 1969, p.54). Luck asks the question of how one can view the enormous scope of marketing and consider it to be “narrowly defined” and tries to answer this question by stating that Kotler and Levy want marketers to justify themselves by applying their skills to an increasingly interesting range of social activity because they have guilt feelings. After all, profit-making business activities may not be socially beneficial. Luck calls this “we’re not yet societal” syndrome and finds it becoming fashionable to an unfortunate degree. “It would divert marketers from the stern and difficult dedications to identifying marketing problems and their solutions and from energetically promoting the recognition and practice of efficient, responsive marketing. Those who give unselfish dedication to laboring effectively in nonprofit and nonmarketing institutions are applauded, and everyone is urged to spare whatever efforts are possible to aid and support them. However, let us not apologize for being marketers in the real sense. Understanding and improving the marketing system lies all the challenges one could desire” (Luck, 1969, p.54). He even finds it pleasurable inflating marketers’ self-image by claiming that even political campaigns are just another part of marketing, and he saw little to be gained from such reasoning. However, Luck’s vigorous, although respectful voice (as he defines himself) did not become very successful in the marketing arena.

A little time after Luck’s article, Kotler and Levy had an article, “A New Form of Marketing Myopia,” ready as the answer. They stated that “many nonbusiness organizations would benefit from a more conscious awareness and practice of the marketing concept. Treating marketing as a function of only business firms denies that managers of nonbusiness organizations have marketing responsibilities. This view is unrealistic and a new form of marketing myopia” (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p.57). Additionally, marketing academics embraced this radically new conceptualization of their discipline. “The 1970 Autumn Conference of the American Marketing Association was given over to discussing marketing’s newly found role and social purpose. The Journal of Marketing issue of July 1971 was devoted exclusively to Marketing’s Changing Social/Environmental Role, with no published article voicing significant dissent from Kotler and Levy’s proposition” (Graham, 1993, p.3). As Graham (1993) also states, the irony here is that this further extension, while perhaps pandering to the needs of those who feel that marketing cannot be socially valuable if it confines itself to business activities, violates the fundamental premise of the marketing concept which had emerged in the 1950’s with a consumer orientation as its base. The marketing concept contrasted with the selling orientation that had preceded it and the production

orientation that is said to have been the 1930s model of marketing. In terms of the marketing concept, the customer is central, and organizations meet their objectives by discovering and staying in touch with their potential customers' needs and wants and then satisfying them by producing an appropriate product. However, twenty years ago, such reasoning did not impede the rush to accept the proposed extensions to marketing's domain. Following the conference of the American Marketing Association in 1970 and the 1971 *Journal of Marketing* devoted to the theme, in 1972, Kotler published a further paper arguing that the 1969 broadening proposal's main weakness was not that it went too far but did not go far enough. Kotler claimed that marketing should be expanded to include the transactions between any organization and all its public.

This was a significant extension of Kotler and Levy's view in 1969 that marketing was a relevant discipline for all organizations with customers and products. Kotler described marketing in three stages of consciousness. Consciousness One related to the pre-1969 articulation of marketing being essentially a business subject composed of market transactions. Consciousness Two was the 1969 articulation of marketing being appropriate for all organizations with customers and comprised of organization-client transactions. Kotler defines this as the thrust of the original broadening concept. Consciousness Three is the generic and now conventional view of marketing being appropriate for all organizations in their relations, not only with their customers but with all their public. The core concept in Consciousness Three is transactions, and therefore, marketing is said to apply to any social unit seeking to exchange values with other social units. Kotler (1972) states that the original broadening proposal should be broadened still further to include the transactions between an organization and all of its public. He sees marketing as the disciplined task of creating and offering value to others to achieve a desired response. He defines the generic view of marketing by a set of four axioms, which leads to new marketing typologies and views of the tasks of marketing management. Kotler (1972) argues that the broadening proposal's main weakness was not far, but it did not go far enough. He asks, "What then is the disciplinary focus of marketing?" and explains that the core concept of marketing is the transaction. "Marketing is specifically concerned with how transactions are created, stimulated, facilitated, and valued. This is the generic concept of marketing" (Kotler, 1972, p.49). As Kotler states, generic marketing takes a functional rather than a structural view of marketing. "Four axioms define generic marketing. Axiom 1: Marketing involves two or more social units. Axiom 2: At least one of the social units is seeking a specific response from one or more other units concerning some social object. Axiom 3: The market's response probability is not fixed. Axiom 4: Marketing is the attempt to produce the desired response by creating and offering values to the market" (Kotler, 1972, p.53). Additionally, other concerns were voiced about this broadened concept of marketing. Enis also responded to Kotler's argument for further expansion with a wish to deepen rather than broaden the concept of marketing. As Graham also states, whilst broadening the concept of marketing was seen by Enis as a significant contribution to the development of the discipline, he did not see it as straightforward as it first appeared. Instead, he saw it as multi-dimensional. Enis evaluated the usefulness of a concept in terms of its value in explaining the existence or behavior of phenomena. "Broadening" would be more valuable if it were developed in operational terms and tested in actual marketing situations. "Broadening the nature of the product exchanged from economic goods and services to anything of value; broadening the objective of the exchange from profit to any type of payoff; and broadening the target audience of the exchange from consumer to any 'public' that relates to an organization" (Enis, 1973, p.59). Enis did not object to the broadened concept of marketing per se but felt that to be meaningful and useful, it would have to be more comprehensive, better integrated, and communicated with greater clarity. This he called deepening.

Followingly, another concern came from Bartels in 1974 in *The Identity Crisis in Marketing*. Bartels traced the evolution of marketing through various distinct phases since the turn of the century. He saw marketing as initially concerned with the distribution of products. He wondered if marketing was now to be regarded as so broad that perhaps marketing as conceived initially would ultimately reappear under another name, possibly logistics or physical distribution. Specifically, Bartels saw the following disadvantages to broadening the concept of marketing. "On the other hand, there are also some possible disadvantages, broadening the concept of marketing through the notion that techniques derived largely from the study of market phenomena are generic, when in fact those market techniques are applications to the marketplace of a broader class of techniques expressing most basic principles of social behavior" (Bartels, 1974, p.76). As Graham (1993) also states, Carman (1973) and followingly Hunt (1991) state many processes, for example, political processes, do not involve an exchange of values and that marketing should not take such methods under its "disciplinary wing."

Tucker (1974) explicitly attacked Kotler's generic concept as a foundation for theory. Although he felt that there was little harm involved in thinking of a churchgoer as a consumer of religion or a teacher as a salesman of mathematics, he considered it sensible to ask what marketing theory could derive from an intensive study of religious practices or educational efforts. As Graham (1993) also states, despite these comments, the broadened conceptual domain that constitutes the generic concept of marketing has become the dominant paradigm in the marketing discipline. As early as 1974, a survey of randomly selected professors of marketing showed an overwhelming acceptance, over ninety-two percent, of the proposition that the concept of marketing should be expanded to include the marketing of schools, charities, politicians and other nonbusiness activities" (Nickels, 1974). "The survey also showed that marketing professors wanted a broader definition than market transactions. Specifically, the professors wanted emphasis placed in introductory marketing classes on transactions that further the goals of churches, schools, charities, and other social causes" (Nickels, 1974, p.141). "More than 90 percent of the responding professors agreed that the marketing concept should be broadened to include the efforts of nonbusiness organizations to satisfy society's needs" (Nickels, 1974, p.142). Additionally, Shuptrine and Osmanski (1975) went further. They asserted that marketing would have to become vitally concerned with human welfare rather than economic gain and with society's broader needs, aspirations, and potentialities rather than merely with the problems of competition, sales volume, and profit. Also, Foxall acknowledged the dominance of the generic concept of marketing but is critical of the usefulness of the concept as it is based on the notion of exchange. He stated that; "the concept of marketing as a process of matching - of aligning the relationships between organizations and/or individuals - may provide a more coherent framework for any extended concept of the marketing function and marketing-oriented management" (Foxall, 1989, pp. 8-9).

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING RESEARCH

Kotler and Levy realized a great opportunity for marketing people to expand their thinking and apply their skills to an increasingly interesting range of social activities. In the case of broadening the concept of marketing, there are crucial points to define. "All of these organizations are "concerned about their "product" in the eyes of certain "consumers" and are seeking to find "tools" for furthering their acceptance" (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p.12). As Kotler and Levy were societal areas of marketing, they stated that no attempt is made to incorporate this phenomenon in the body proper of marketing thought and theory. No attempt is made to redefine the meaning of product development, pricing, distribution, and communication in these newer contexts to see if they have a useful meaning. No attempt is made to examine whether the principles of "good" marketing in traditional product areas are transferable to marketing services, persons, and ideas. Here, an implication for the marketing research is realized. According to the American Marketing Association, Marketing Research is the function that links the consumer, customer, and public to the marketer through information—information used to identify and define marketing opportunities and problems; generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions; monitor marketing performance; and improve the understanding of marketing as a process. Marketing research can be conducted in two ways: quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative marketing research emphasizes collecting and analyzing information in the form of numbers, collecting scores that measure distinct attributes of individuals and organizations, and the procedures of comparing groups or relating factors about individuals or groups in experiments, correlational studies, and surveys. In contrast, qualitative marketing research explains a central phenomenon rather than a research question or hypothesis, using methods such as observations, interviews, and designs such as case studies, grounded theory, and narrative. It is an alternative perspective to traditional research and, based on naturalistic inquiry or constructivism, considers the participant's point of view and describes the participant's opinion within a setting or context. This shows that, with time, the understanding of marketing research has changed, and primarily, qualitative approaches have become preferred over quantitative ones. The main reason is that qualitative research explores a phenomenon rather than a question or hypothesis and describes a participant's view within a setting or context. This clearly shows an attempt to incorporate this phenomenon in the body proper of marketing thought and theory and redefine the meaning of product development, pricing, distribution, and communication in these newer contexts to see if they have a practical sense. So, we see a significant implication of marketing research in broadening the marketing concept. According to Kotler and Levy, business organizations increasingly recognize that customer needs and behavior are not apparent without formal research and analysis; they cannot rely on impressionistic evidence. Business organizations gather continuous information about environmental changes and their

performance. They use their salespeople, research department, specialized research services, and other means to check on the movement of goods, competitors' actions, and customers' feelings to ensure they are progressing along satisfactory lines. An channels, and messages in the light of current trends and needs (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p.15). organization “must reexamine its primary business, target groups, differential advantage, communication

V. CONCLUSION

This discussion shows a significant implication for modern marketing research since organizations and managers increasingly use qualitative marketing research applications to explore and understand consumers' inner feelings and needs. Marketing research in the contemporary era is not known as searching to answer the apparent marketing questions. Still, relatively marketers realized that they have to understand the inner of consumers and even competitors to be able to succeed in any kind of modern marketing application, such as consumer familiarization and cultural assessment, idea generation, new product development, positioning, branding, attitude and usage studies, naming and packaging refinement, advertising and promotion, or usability. Marketers are increasingly approaching understanding the consumer as a human behavior and analyzing inner sides rather than trying to explore the products and market environment. As Levitt and also Kotler and Levy emphasized, “the marketing concept holds that the problem of all business firms in an age of abundance is to develop customer loyalties and satisfaction, and the key to this problem is to focus on the customers' needs” (Levitt, 1960, pp. 45-56). And as stated in the Broadening the Concept of Marketing, “by this recognition that effective marketing requires consumer orientation instead of a product orientation” (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p.15). Qualitative marketing research focuses on consumer orientation instead of product orientation; this shows the main implications of Kotler's broadened view of marketing. According to Kotler, “each of these organizations faces marketing problems concerning its product and customer group. They must study the size and composition of their market, and consumer wants attitudes and habits” (Kotler, 1972, p.48). He emphasizes that marketers must focus on values and consequences. As we examine the qualitative marketing research approach and its methods, we see that for conducting the research, marketers use methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, ethnographic studies, or grounded theories. All of these methods work on exploring consumers' insight and techniques to try to link products and consumers' perception processes. Instead of focusing on products, marketers try to understand customers' values and connect them with product attributes. Marketers now interview consumers to understand inner feelings, senses, and values and observe and study them to explore behavior patterns and uncover motivation, beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and life words. This calls for Kotler's Generic Concept of Marketing, whereby effective marketing calls for marketers to be informed of the attitudinal and behavioral responses he is achieving in the marketplace. This shows the significant implications of the Generic Concept of Marketing for marketing research. All the discussion above clearly supports that the broadened view of marketing that Kotler proposed in his article "A Generic Concept of Marketing" (1972, *Journal of Marketing*) became the view of marketing generally accepted by marketers, and marketers widely apply its implications for marketing research.

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