

What form should marketing theory take? The Fall 1983 edition of the Journal of Marketing began the next 'round' in the contest about the nature of marketing theory (Kavanagh (1994) likens the debate to a boxing match). In that edition Paul Anderson questions particularly Hunt's positivistic concept of the scientific method: 'Despite its prevalence in marketing, positivism has been abandoned by these disciplines [philosophy and sociology of science] over the last two decades in the face of overwhelming historical and logical arguments that have been raised against it' (1983: 25). **Thus, the debate moved from whether marketing can have scientific theory to what form of scientific theory is appropriate.** It is argued that there is no longer one 'correct' method for evaluating theory and different research disciplines will adopt different methodologies, ontologies and epistemologies. These marketing theorists draw on Kuhn's (1962) revolutionary view of scientific progress in terms of competing paradigms (see Dholakia and Arndt, 1985), which within any discipline are 'incommensurable' – that is scientists of each persuasion have different 'world-views' and are unable to agree on salient problems, theories or terminologies to be employed, and thus could never agree on any 'experiments' or data that would resolve their differences. **In marketing, Anderson (1983) cites theory of consumer behaviour and theory of the firm as incommensurable.** With no agreed or agree-able 'demarcation criterion' between theory and non-theory, or even science and non-science, in marketing, Anderson concludes that a relativistic approach is the only viable one. Baker & Saren-4011-CH-02: Baker & Saren-4011-CH-02 24/02/2010 6:32 PM Page 32 32 OVERVIEW OF MARKETING THEORY As Kavanagh (1994) notes, Hunt (1984) was quick to counter-attack Anderson's naive relativist advocacy, which can easily be forced to its (il)logical conclusion of nihilism, ontological solipsism (death of the object) and epistemological anarchy (can't know anything or can know everything). Interestingly, both Hunt and Anderson moved their positions somewhat after each other's attack in this 'round' in order to defend their 'weak flanks'. **Hunt moved from logical empiricism to scientific realism, in which he accepts a critical realist position that some of our perceptions may be illusions and certainly some are more accurate than others (thus moderating pure empiricism).** Therefore the job of science is to develop theories that have 'long-run predictive success' (Hunt, 1990) in explaining behaviour, 'even if we cannot finally "know" whether the entities and structure postulated by the theory actually exists' (McMullin, 1984: 26). Anderson meanwhile was adopting critical relativism which accepts the possibility of a single pre-existing 'reality', but rejects the notion that it can be discovered via the scientific method (1986: 157). So, it seemed for a while that boxing had brought them closer together. This debate between realism and relativism in marketing theory mirrors debate which had been going on in the social sciences (see Burrell and Morgan, 1979) about how we can know the world; is reality out there or a product of one's mind? As Kavanagh rightly observes, epistemology and ontology tend to be conflated in all these debates – that is, 'being is reduced to knowledge and knowledge is reduced to being' (1994: 31). Although this certainly all follows from the Cartesian dictum cogito ergo sum, the question for marketing theory is that we need to be able to know more about reality beyond one's own existence. Hunt (1976) refutes of all forms of relativism, arguing that the knowledge claims of any theory must be objective in the sense that 'its truth content must be intersubjectively certifiable' and that 'requiring that theories, laws and explanations be empirically testable ensures that they will be intersubjectively certifiable since

different (but reasonably competent) investigators with differing attitudes, opinions and beliefs will be able to make observations and conduct experiments to ascertain their truth content' (Hunt, 1976: 27). He challenges all those academics in what he calls marketing's 'crisis literature' who have questioned the very possibility of objective marketing research, for example, 'Objectivity is an illusion' (Peter, 1992: 77), 'objectivity is impossible' (Mick, 1986: 207)), 'Researcher objectivity and intersubjective certifiability are chimeras – they cannot be achieved' (Fullerton, 1986: 433). Hunt categorizes and articulates the five 'primary arguments' which marketing writers have employed 'ostensibly implying the impossibility of objective marketing research' (1993: 80). He summarizes these along with their original philosophical sources (see Table 2.1) and then refutes each argument from a scientific realist perspective, often asserting that the marketing authors have misconstrued, misunderstood or misapplied the ideas from the philosophy of science literature. Following the discussion above of the influence on marketing theory of Kuhnian ideas about the progress of science (see also Dholakia and Arndt, 1985), take, for example, Hunt's refutation of argument 2 in Table 2.1, which had been used by Anderson *inter alia*, that 'objectivity is impossible because the paradigms that

202-Baker & Saren-4011-CH-02: Baker & Saren-4011-CH-02
24/02/2010 6:32 PM Page 33 MARKETING THEORY 33 Table 2.1 Arguments against objectivity

1. Objectivity is impossible because the language of a culture determines the reality that members of that culture see.
2. Objectivity is impossible because the paradigms that researchers hold are incommensurable.
3. Objectivity is impossible because theories are undermined by facts.
4. Objectivity is impossible because the psychology of perception informs us that a theory-free observation language is impossible.
5. Objectivity is impossible because all epistemically significant observations are theory-laden.

Source: Adapted from Hunt (1993) *Journal of Marketing* 57, April: 76–91. Reprinted with permission from the *Journal of Marketing*, published by the American Marketing Association.

researchers hold are incommensurable'. Countering it Hunt (1993: 82) makes two points; firstly that it is 'simply incoherent' to compare and contrast different paradigms in marketing and then to claim that they are incommensurable because they are 'non-comparable', and secondly, that for incommensurability to bar objective choice between two paradigms implies that they are rival, but most of the so-called paradigms identified by marketers are simply different, not necessarily putting forward conflicting knowledge claims. Going on to counter all five arguments, Hunt concludes that 'there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in modern philosophy of science or psychology that makes objectivity either impossible or undesirable' (1993: 87). Whether Hunt is correct or not about 'rival' or 'different' paradigms in marketing there certainly are a lot of them. Carmen (1980) identifies six (microeconomic, persuasion/attitude change, conflict resolution, generalist system, functionalist and social exchange paradigms), Fisk and Meyers (1982) classify another six (network flow, market scarcity, competitive marketing management, evolutionary systems change, general systems and dissipative structures paradigms). Sheth et al. (1988) list 12 'schools of thought' in marketing (commodity, functional, functionalist, regional, institutional, managerial, buyer behaviour, activist, macromarketing, organizational dynamics and social exchange schools). Kerin (1996) chooses six 'metaphors' which characterized marketing science and practice in each of the six decades since the launch of the *Journal of Marketing* in 1936. – marketing as applied economics, a managerial activity, a quantitative science, a behavioural

science, a decision science and as an integrative science. Wilkie and Moore (2003) identify '4 eras' of thought development, which are: 1900–1920, 'Founding the Field'; 1920–1950, 'Formalizing the Field'; 1950–1980, 'A Paradigm Shift – Marketing, Management, and the Sciences'; 1980–present, 'The Shift Intensifies – A Fragmentation of the Mainstream'. Of course, taking Hunt's point about interpreting Kuhn's ideas correctly, many of the above are not strictly 'paradigms' and it can be seen that they are by no means all posited as such. Indeed, as so often happens with even the supposedly technical language of science (cf. argument 1 in Table 2.1 above), a term loses its 'original' meaning in the noise of academic discourse. The 'paradigm' is (adopting the vernacular) an excellent paradigm of this phenomenon. Even those who take an 'alternative paradigm' approach to marketing theory recognize this. 'It is commonly agreed that the paradigm concept itself remains somewhat vague and unclear. This is partly because [it] has taken on different meanings over time' (Arndt, 1985: 19). Even in Baker & Saren (2011).

Figure 2.1 Paradigms and metaphors in marketing (Arndt, 1985)

Source: Arndt (1985) Journal of Marketing 49, Summer: 18–23. Reprinted with permission from the Journal of Marketing, published by the American Marketing Association. Its original formulation the notion was ambiguous and Kuhn has been accused of using the paradigm notion in many different ways (Morgan, 1980). Arndt (1985) attempts to make sense of the concept for use in marketing theory by adapting Morgan's (1980) hierarchy, which distinguishes paradigms (alternative realities or world views) at the second level from orientations (perspective of the researcher relating to the role of data, theory and values) above it at level 1 with metaphors (basis for schools of thought) at level 3 and puzzle-solving (based on specific tools or procedures) at level 4. Using Morgan's framework, Arndt analyses and categorizes the different paradigms and metaphors in marketing theory, identifying four main paradigms based on different (and indeed one would have to say conflicting) world views. These contain 'different metatheoretical assumptions about the nature of science, the subjective – objective dimension and the explicitness of long-term conflicts in society. There are also assumptions about the nature of the marketing discipline and the study of marketing phenomena' (Arndt, 1985: 15). These are shown in Figure 2.1. classified along two dimensions – objective/subjective and harmony/conflict. He thus classifies four paradigms in marketing along these dimensions: (i) logical empiricist; (ii) sociopolitical; (iii) subjective world; and (iv) liberating paradigms. The Logical empiricist paradigm emphasizes measurability and intersubjective certification. It takes a mechanistic approach, assuming that marketing relations have a real existence independent of the observer and a systematic character resulting in regularities in marketing behaviour and equilibrium-seeking marketing systems. Neoclassical economics provides the basis for many of its typical metaphors such as instrumental man with rational decision-

making and the organism metaphor for the organized behaviour and environmental learning of the marketing system.02-Baker & Saren-4011-CH-02:Baker & Saren-4011-CH-02 24/02/2010 6:32 PM Page 35 MARKETING THEORY 35 The sociopolitical paradigm is similarly based on the assumption of a real and measurable world of marketing phenomena and predictable uniformities in marketing behaviour. Unlike the value-free and equilibrium assumptions of logical empirical theories however, this paradigm explicitly recognizes conflicts of interests, resources and relations in marketing exchanges and systems. The metaphors of this paradigm constitute the political markets and economies and even spaceship Earth, the global, ecological approach of much of what would nowadays be called green marketing. The subjective world paradigm rejects the existence of social reality in any verifiable or concrete sense. It is the product of the subjective experiences and inter-experiences of individuals and therefore marketing phenomena cannot be understood from the perspective of an external observer, but must be studied from the viewpoint of the participant. It thus incorporates the interpretive and social constructionist approaches and adopts the motivational and psychology-based metaphor of irrational man, the phenomenological metaphor of experiencing man, with an existential and semiological basis, and the language and text metaphor for understanding the behaviour of marketing actors from stories, myths, rhetoric and discourse. The liberating paradigm also takes a social constructionist perspective regarding the ontological status of reality but focuses on the social, economic and technological processes that constrain and control human beings in the marketing system. The role of theoretical inquiry is to identify and analyse the conflicts and contradictions in the system and point the way to emancipation. Critical theory adherents within this paradigm often take alienation and victimization as metaphors for the oppressed groups in modern mass consumer society. A strong case is made by Arndt (1985) that marketing has been dominated by one paradigm – that is, logical empiricism. Even a cursory perusal of scholarly articles in marketing journals is bound to confirm the dominant status of logical empiricism. The principles of empiricism appear to be treated synonymously with the scientific method as such ... The control technology and instrumentalism of the logical empiricist paradigm may well be compatible with the problem solving needs and pragmatism of marketing practitioners. (Arndt, 1985: 19) This is directly opposed by Hunt's contention that to even ask the question 'what philosophy dominates marketing?' presumes that marketing is dominated (which carries pejorative overtones) by one view or another and that in any case, on the contrary, 'the marketing discipline has been amazingly eclectic' and 'the most accurate answer is: 'No single philosophy dominates marketing. (Hunt, 1991: 398) Arndt makes a strong case for pluralism in orientations and paradigms for the development of marketing theory: 'by limiting itself to the empiricist orientation and logical empiricist paradigms such as instrumental man, marketing has remained essentially a one-dimensional science concerned with technology and problem solving'. (Arndt 1985: 21). Adopting other paradigms and metaphors will result in the asking of quite different research questions. 'The notion of paradigms should be viewed as an argument for paradigmatic tolerance and pluralism'02-Baker & Saren-4011-CH-02:Baker & Saren-4011-CH-02 24/02/2010 6:32 PM Page 36 36 OVERVIEW OF MARKETING THEORY (Arndt, 1985: 21). Perhaps this explains one reason why Hunt goes to such great effort to reject the notion itself for marketing theory? Despite the length and intensity of the debate regarding the appropriate charac-

teristics of and scientific underpinning for the development of marketing theories, and despite the coalescence of key positions around the two poles of relativism and realism, there is no consensus as to what marketing theory should be like. We do have several competing schools of thought, if not exactly 'paradigms'. Attempts at constructing 'general/generic' theories of marketing (Alderson, 1957; Bartels, 1968; Kotler, 1972) have not led to any shared, let alone agreed theoretical basis for the discipline. Worse still, whether it is because of over-emphasis on empirical research at the expense of theory generation by positivists (Deshpande, 1983; Peter, 1992: 72–79) or because of the advocacy of loosely thought out epistemo- logical 'anarchy' by relativists (Hunt, 1994), the one thing that most authors on both sides agree about is that, since Alderson and Cox's call 60 years ago, market- ing theory has not advanced as well as it should have done – or even satisfactorily. The next question then is: 'What's gone wrong?'