

Is That Going To Be On The Exam? Almost 50 Years of General Marketing Textbooks.

Stanley C. Hollander
Michigan State University

The Ohio State students have hit upon the essential nature of the 1950's general marketing textbooks in their presentation to the 8th Conference on Historical Research and Marketing and Marketing Thought. I believe that the authors of the basic general marketing text of the 1950's, Maynard and Beckman, Converse and Huegy, Phillips and Duncan were interested in justifying marketing. They sought to respond to criticisms from both economists and the general public. Probably they were most strongly affected by the agrarian reaction to the development of a complex food marketing system. I have never found any really valid evidence to substantiate this hunch but I still think that risk-taking (which after all is a function of all business) was regularly described as a particularly marketing function because it provided a justification for dealing in grain futures. Those of us who now live in almost totally urbanized environments really have little sense of the pervasiveness of farm hostility toward the Board of Trade and Grain Exchange futures market. The authors mentioned seem to believe that criticism of the system would be vastly reduced if only people could be taught what the system was and how it functioned. To understand would not be merely to forgive, but rather to appreciate.

Even more importantly and directly, these classic authors definitely felt that one cannot learn much about marketing without having a clear picture of its structure and activities. They felt that students had to be taken through the descriptive material just as beginning language students had to learn vocabulary, grammar, declensions and conjugations. At a panel on marketing curriculum at one AMA meeting, professor Theodore Beckman of Ohio State, enunciated this position very clearly. Those who remember him know that when professor Beckman enunciated a position, the earth trembled, angels danced, and the desk expected a fist-pounding. There was no room for debate.

Beckman said that marketing education was similar to medical education. The student started with anatomy, the description of the basic structure. The medical student then went on to physiology or, i.e. bodily functioning, which had its marketing analogy in specialized courses such wholesaling, sales management and market research. Finally, the fully prepared student was ready to enter the clinical phase of diagnosis and prescription. It was equivalent to the case method capstone course in the marketing curriculum. My own mentor, professor Reavis Cox of the University of Pennsylvania, was whole worlds apart from Beckman with regard to many aspects of marketing practice, theory and education.

The urge that Cox felt was a much more conceptual and theoretical approach. Yet, in conversation he often remarked that he would like to take new marketing students by the hand and walk them down main street and say "Now that is a wholesale lumber warehouse; that is a shoe store; that is a farm machinery franchise dealer; etc.

He required his doctoral students, not without encountering some resentment, to read a book designed for supplementary use in elementary education, How Great Cities are Fed. He felt that

people who believed that milk came from the cows in glass bottles and paper cartons needed to know something very clear, very specific about the complex mechanism behind the supermarket shelves.

The objectives were laudable and the approach seems reasonable. Yet, as the Ohio State group has pointed out, these books were rather suddenly and rudely replaced by the prevailing "managerial" model. McCarthy's "4 Ps" swept the field with astonishing rapidity. Why? The answer can only be conjecture but I believe several factors operated to induce this change:

- As Dr. Davidson pointed out, the popular 1950's books used various combinations of the three great historic approaches: institutional, functional and commodity. The pattern, as he remarked, the sequence of presentation varied and the relevant emphasis on each varied. But all included varying amounts of these three approaches. That created no problem for those of us who were teaching and were really interested in marketing. We could easily look at our favorite subject from a variety of perspectives. But, many of the students could not or did not synthesize the material. Marketing seemed to them a vague and formless subject without any unifying core of theme around which they could position the things they learned.
- By the 1950's, the United States had become an industrialized country. World War II had ended with enormous stimulation to our factory system. The population had shifted, more and more, into the cities and was then beginning to move out to the suburbs. The dominant texts of the 1950's were written by men who had shaped their ideas earlier and who often came from rural backgrounds. Discussions of such things as the commodities markets and grain futures were much less relevant to the urbanized students who were part of the new and expanded generation of college attendees.
- It may be that the descriptive approach of the 1950's and earlier lent itself to a type of passive and linear writing that increasingly went out of favor as succeeding waves of students became more attuned to the abrupt, chaotic and less attention demanding communications style induced by television.
- Finally, perhaps most important, students came to business school to learn how to make money. They had little patience with background and wanted instant gratification of the desire to be managers. Thus, they were drawn to introductory marketing approaches that could legitimately be called managerial.

Thus, in a roundabout way, students expressed dissatisfaction with the prevailing introductory textbooks. This was reflected in student comments, problems in maintaining marketing major enrollment and, of course, the growing practice of student evaluations. That dissatisfaction flowed through the professorate to the textbook publishers who were eager to find student-pleasing products. The net result was a paradigm shift.

The movement from macro description to micro management was the most basic evolution in general marketing text over the period. It should be remembered that this was really not as much a change in ends as in means. The earlier writers did feel, with some justification, that people needed to know what they were talking about before they tried to reach managerial decisions.

There have been, of course, many other changes. Books are now "politically correct." Chauvinism has been reduced, if not totally eliminated. Style and vocabulary have been "dumbed down", not because today's authors are any dumber or any less intelligent than their predecessors, but because the publishers are very vigilant in seeing that no strain on student literacy is allowed to creep between the covers. The pretty pictures, tintblocks and vignettes adorn the books while page length and contextual content is steadily compressed. Also, as was pointed out during the session in Kingston, today's competition between textbooks pays much more attention to supplementary materials, teaching aides and a whole set of paraphernalia than was once common.

I do think that it is possible to fall into a false nostalgia for a nonexistent prior world of variety that has supposedly vanished. The analysis presented at Kingston did look at two quite extraordinary books, Vaile, Grether & Cox and Duddy & Revzen. But very few students in the 1950's studied out of those texts. They were not successful. I was Cox's research assistant when he was preparing his book and know how meager the returns were. In fact, Cox told me that he and Grether sold their rights, in any subsequent editions of the book, to Vaile for \$500 each sometime before Vaile's death. There never was a second edition. The book was extremely interesting and thoughtful but also chaotic, difficult and probably almost unteachable. The Duddy & Revzen book did not fare much better. If one is to draw a comparison of the two periods, the comparison should be based upon either the most popular books in both periods or all of the books in each period. The former approach seems more practical. To try to mix them is only confusing.

Yet, the more interesting movement towards diversity may be on the horizon. Faculty who teach courses of almost any significant size, can order customized editions of many current books that will contain only chapters that they want. Such expurgated editions can then be supplemented by course packs of the instructor's own design. The possibilities for variation become almost infinite. Many, in my generation, feel that we have been marketing professors at perhaps the very best time to be in this line of work. Yet, nevertheless, it would be fascinating to know what lies ahead.