



WORKING PAPER SERIES

08-11

Neo-Pragmatism: Implications for Research and Teaching

ISSN 1179-3023 (online)
ISBN 978-0-475-12366-4

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ABSTRACT

The marketing discipline is facing a number of challenges, namely the encroachment of the marketing arena by other disciplines, the role of consumer behaviour, the academic practitioner gap, and the postmodern condition. For those involved in the marketing discipline, these challenges can be dissipated by adopting neo-pragmatism as a research protocol. Neo-pragmatism, based on the linguistic turn in modern philosophy, is anti-foundational, anti-essentialism, but accepts rationality within a specific context and historical epoch. Ontology and epistemology are collapsed, and replaced by ontological hermeneutics with the goal of developing understanding by exploring praxis. This leads to marketing-as-practice being the research endeavour. Such an approach is concerned with how marketing is done, so the focus is on how individuals think, speak, politicise and routinely interact within the work place. This has implications for research and teaching, where the move is away from prescriptive models and generalizations to insights gained from an understanding of practical actions within a given context.

Keywords

neo-pragmatism, praxis, marketing-as-practice, teaching, research

INTRODUCTION:

It has been claimed that the academic discipline of marketing is facing a crisis (Brown, 1995; Saren, 2000). The reason for the crisis can be reduced to two main issues. The first is that the discipline of marketing faces a number of challenges and the second is that the marketing discipline has failed to embrace the linguistic turn in modern philosophy. Whilst the marketing academia has concerned itself with the former issue, it is argued that by addressing the second issue, the first issue will be clarified.

The paper will begin by briefly outlining the issues around the scope of marketing. This will be followed by an exploration of the linguistic turn in modern philosophy and its challenge to the dominant paradigm in marketing. This leads to the introduction of neo-pragmatism as a research protocol, with its emphasis on ontological hermeneutics and praxis. A consequence of adopting such a protocol is that there is an emphasis on understanding marketing-as-practice. Such an approach has implications for the scope of the marketing enquiry, and consequently implications for teaching and research.

CHALLENGES

The subject matter of the marketing discipline is being debated and the discipline faces a number of challenges. The first challenge is that the scope of the discipline is being eroded by other disciplines infringing on its topic area, such as information systems, operations management, human relations and strategy (Piercy, 2002; Brown, 1995). The information systems discipline is increasingly showing an interest in database marketing and internet marketing (Records & Pitt, 2003; Zhang, Fang & Sheng, 2007). The operations management discipline has explored customer satisfaction and service delivery (Affisco & Soliman, 2006; Xue, Hitt & Harker, 2007; Gunes & Aksin, 2004; Roth & van der Velde, 1991; Ba & Johansson, 2008), whereas the human relations discipline has explored the topic of employer branding (Salkey, 2005). Finally, strategic management has investigated both corporate and product branding, and the area of brand management in general (Fox, 2002; Wise & Zednickova, 2009; Herstein & Jaffe, 2007).

The second challenge concerns the relationship between consumer behaviour and the marketing discipline. Whilst marketing and consumer behaviour have been synonymous, and have a symbiotic relationship, the case can be made for the discipline of consumer behaviour to be seen as a distinct discipline (Hirschman, 1993), especially given the wider scope of the topic,

which would include a critique of consumption and consumerism (Saren, 2000; Hackley, 2001). Arnould and Thompson (2005), along with Belk (1998) also argue that consumer behaviour needs to be separate from the managerial implications of marketing. Whereas the marketing discipline is an applied discipline, it is not necessarily the case with consumer behaviour.

The third challenge is the widening gap between academic endeavour and practice. Whilst some academics argue that the marketing discipline needs to isolate itself from the practitioners (Holbrook, 1985), the general view is that marketing, as an applied discipline needs to be of use to marketers. Brown (1996), on commenting upon the pro-scientists view that mixing with practitioners has tainted the bid for marketing to gain academic respectability, believes that marketing is an activity-based discipline. 'Abandoning the connection with practitioners is the thanatic equivalent of academic educationalists attempting to cut themselves off from educators, medical researchers from practitioners of medicine, legal studies from lawyers, the architectural academy from architects, and scholars of nursing from nurses. The very term "marketing" carries connotations of "doing" (Brown, 1996 p. 266). Marketing, like many 'applied' disciplines, tends to follow a pragmatic approach founded on an enterprise discourse based on agendas and concerns set by practitioners. This is in contrast to 'pure' areas where research is linear and developed according to an academic agenda (Tranfield & Starkey, 1998).

Ottensen & Gronhaug (2004) states three reasons why practitioners do not use marketing academic literature. First, they see academic articles as useless and trivial. In many cases the information is seen as too complex. Second, they may not have the required knowledge to understand the literature, as the dominant paradigm utilises highly sophisticated statistical methods to explore marketing phenomena. In many cases, articles need to be translated by an academic into practice friendly literature, but do they have the skills to do this? Finally, practitioners are unaware of the information due to, on the one hand, the proliferation of journals, whilst on the other hand, often have limited access. A corollary to this is that managers are pressurised with regards to the allocation of time, so the reading of academic articles becomes a low priority.

The last challenge is that of postmodernism, which has haunted the marketing discipline over the last fifteen years (Brown, 1993, 1995; Firat et al, 1995; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Whilst it can be claimed that postmodernism has failed to provide a more attractive alternative (Kavanagh, 1994; Brown, 1995) it provides endless challenges for the field of marketing.

It has been suggested by Kilduff & Mehra (1997) that there may be as many postmodernisms as there are postmodernists. Therefore, given the diversity of the subject it is necessary to make certain important distinctions. The first is between postmodernism as cultural analysis compared to postmodernism as philosophical analysis. Brown (1999) makes a distinction between three types of postmodernism, namely art/architecture, social/economic, and philosophy, and Schatzki (1993) also makes a distinction between philosophical post modernity and social history. In this case, social history is taken to mean the same as cultural analysis. Cova and Elliot (2008) argue that a distinction needs to be made between researchers who are interested on the one hand in post-modernity, that is, the study of the shift from modernity to an understanding how the world is changing from a cultural perspective, and on the other hand an interest in the postmodern turn, which involves a specific philosophical perspective, with ontological and epistemological assumptions. Parker (1992) too makes the distinction between post modernity as a historical periodization and post modernity as a theoretical perspective, which is epistemological in nature.

Therefore, the cultural analysis perspective is concerned with changes in the mode of production within capitalism, where there has been a shift from production to consumption and an expansion of felt consumer needs. Within this, certain trends can be observed such as the decline of organised religion, the demise of the nuclear family, the proliferation of media and the increase of communication technologies. Also within this category is the rise of mass customization whereby niche markets are supplied by service-driven company cultures. This has meant that appearances have become important with an emphasis on style, surfaces, and spectacle. A consequence of this shift has been the erosion of the boundaries between high and low cultures (Lutz, 1993). The consumer behaviour discipline has explored the cultural analysis perspective (Brown 1994, 1999; Firat et al, 1995) by utilizing key concepts such as fragmentation, dedifferentiation, hyper-reality, and pastiche. Fragmentation is evident within the marketing discipline, with diverse topics as political, tourism, fashion, service, not-for-profit, relationship, macro, and sport marketing, all vying for the spotlight.

The second distinction is between sceptical postmodernism (Rosenau, 1992), sometimes termed critical postmodernism (Firat, 1995), and affirmative postmodernism, sometimes referred to as 'after-modernism' (Whittington, 2006). Sceptical postmodernism is seen as a 'pessimistic, negative and gloomy' belief regarding the possibilities of there ever being a legitimate social science (Rosenau, 1992, p. 15). However, affirmative postmodernism allows for discrimination

between different interpretations. Therefore, a social science is possible that ‘embraces and does not exclude the world, reality, history’ (Derrida, 1988 p. 137). According to O’Shaughnessy (2002), the French postmodernists are extreme in their views and can be equated with sceptical postmodernism, whereas the affirmative postmodernists are less dogmatic and sceptical about rationality and are associated with American thinking.

THE LINGUISTIC TURN

There has been a growing uneasiness within the marketing discipline that the present way of conducting research has led to disappointing results (Brownlie & Saren, 1992; Brown, 1995; Saren, 2000; November, 2004). This is primarily due to the discipline attempting to emulate scientific procedures in order to gain respectability (Willmott, 1993). This type of scientism makes the claim that scientific procedures based on the natural sciences, using their methods and imagery, are applicable to all areas of knowledge generation in the social world.

Although the term ‘scientism’ has many meanings, here it is about the production of knowledge where disputes are settled by deciding whether the scientific method has been applied appropriately (Willmott, 1993). Therefore, any questions or concerns about the research that has been undertaken are kept at a methodological level, with a focus on technical procedures. Consequently, assumptions at an ontological and epistemological level are blindly accepted or altogether ignored.

In contrast to the dominant, scientific paradigm of marketing, a number of authors have recently made the claim that a new marketing paradigm is needed. Gronroos states that ‘a paradigm shift in marketing is needed if marketing is going to survive as a discipline’ (Gronroos, 1994, p. 4). In his 1994 article ‘From Marketing Mix to Relationship Marketing: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Marketing’, he argues that there has been a move away from traditional marketing. He claims that the marketing mix, commonly known as the 4 P’s, no longer applies to the modern world as it was developed in North America in the 1950’s for the ‘fast moving consumer goods’ market where there was a large domestic market with a unique media structure and a competitive distribution system. Other authors, such as Buttle (1994) and Brodie et al (1997) also reiterate the claim that Relationship Marketing is a new paradigm. Achrol (1991) talks about the need of a new paradigm to take into account network organisations. Vargo and Lusch (2004) argue that the new dominant logic for marketing is based on intangible resources,

value creation and the management of relationships. They argue that service provision will replace the economic exchange model based on a goods centred approach.

There have been a number of contenders for the new paradigm. Hackley (1999) has written about the use of the social constructionist perspective for qualitative research in marketing. Burton (2001) has shown how critical theory can be used in marketing discourse and recently Easton (2002) has introduced critical realism as a contender for the marketing science school. All these contenders, however, fit neatly into the paradigm framework developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and adopted by Arndt (1985).

As referred to earlier, postmodernism can be seen from a philosophical point of view, which is best captured by what Rorty, (1992) calls the linguistic turn in modern philosophy. The linguistic turn challenges a number of basic assumptions held by analytical philosophy. The first challenge is the notion of an independent actor based on a Kantian-Cartesian conception of reason with the individual pursuing their own self-interest. The second challenge is the correspondence theory of truth, which assumes knowledge is a representation of reality. Instead, the works of the philosophers Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Rorty are used to emphasise the importance role of language in forming our view of the world. It is language that gives us our world. As culture is encoded in language, it elevates language and text to a key position in any discipline.

NEO-PRAGMATISM

In terms of his postmodern stance, Rorty claims that his philosophy is a complete break from modernism. But in terms of the basic principles of Western thinking, Rorty assumes an essential continuity from modernity to postmodern thinking (Dupre, 1993). Whilst not wanting to throw out rationality completely, reliable knowledge is based on the rules of the community rather than some divine rules of truth. What legitimises truth is the praxis of communication. This makes the search for metanarratives superfluous as a search beyond them for legitimation is pointless. Following on from the above, Rorty does not want to dismiss logo centricism, in the sense that language has a privileged position as it enables one to understand the world. It is one thing to dispense with logo centric metaphysics that searches for some type of essential or foundational truth, but the rationality of speech needs to be preserved. In comparison to Derrida, it is this aspect of Rorty's writings that make him an affirmative postmodernist.

However, it is necessary to explore neo-pragmatism in more depth so as to understand what Rorty is saying and to determine how his work could lead to a new approach to generate marketing knowledge. To achieve this goal it is helpful to understand his work in 'Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature' at distinct but interrelated levels. Bernstein (1983) claims that Rorty has two streams of consciousness within his writing. One is a metacritique and the other is a rhetorical defense of pragmatism, which states as a bottom line that philosophy is not constructive as there are no foundations for it to build on. Following Heidegger (1983), Wittgenstein (1974), Foucault and Derrida (1988), Rorty wants to end philosophy. His main argument is that analytical philosophy has extolled the virtues of scientific knowledge based on a foundational positivistic empiricism at the expense of other forms of knowledge creation, such as poetry and art. Unlike the positivists who put science on a pedestal, Rorty sees the poet and literary critics as the new cultural heroes and on an equal footing as science.

To understand his position it is necessary to place it in a historical context. According to Dupre (1993), the Greek tradition developed an ontological synthesis which gave culture a coherence regarding its integration with reality. 'When this synthesis began to unravel in the fifteenth century, language and reality, power and dependence, immanence and transcendence separated into oppositional poles. Metaphysics, the traditional reflection upon this unity, came to be replaced by an epistemological search for "foundations" of each of these fragments' (Dupre, 1993, p. 294). When thinkers in the twentieth century came to grips with the situation different philosophical movements arose, such as logical positivism, existentialism, structuralism, and deconstructionism in an attempt to articulate a consistent position.

However, the above movements were undertaken in a modernist perspective. One basic tenet of modernism is that it views the world in a mechanistic way, in the sense that the world was perceived to be structured and integrated so that cause and effect could be measured. This view meant that positivism-empiricism has flourished, at the expense of other philosophical movements. Positivism-empiricism holds the view that problems are easy to identify and that there are clear-cut solutions. Such a view is dependent on the notion that there is an objective "observer" of phenomena that exists out there in the world. The researcher working within this paradigm is attempting to find out how the system works and identify the true nature of the order of things. According to Rorty (1982) the positivists want to search for the final vocabulary,

which is the anchor to all other vocabularies. This can be related back to the Cartesian quest for certainty.

This quest was an attempt to escape from history to find non-historical conditions about nature and the existence of man. In this sense the ambition was to ascertain the foundation of knowledge by determining the basis of knowledge claims and the understanding of the mind. It can be claimed that Locke (Flew, 1971) was the first philosopher to start this quest by making the distinction between mind and body and stating that the mind was a separate entity. Descartes (Flew, 1971) carried on the quest by postulating that the mind was a mental substance. It was Descartes who can be credited with what Bernstein (1983) terms the Cartesian Anxiety, a construct that attempts to use reason to find the foundation of knowledge, for example, mind-body dualism. Descartes' 'Meditations' portrays a journal of the social being on a quest using meditative reflection to deepen his/her understanding of human finitude. What does it really mean to be limited, finite creatures? Descartes is looking for a fixed point, a stable rock, as a base for human knowledge. This fixed point is not only at a metaphysical and epistemological level but also at a spiritual level. However, it was Kant (Flew, 1971) that positioned philosophy as a foundational subject, in the sense that it underwrites or challenges the claims of other disciplines.

The claim that philosophy is a foundational subject needs to be seen in connection with the downfall of religious dominance in western society. Rorty believes that the theologians used to be the moral custodians but they were replaced by philosophers. However, scientists took over from the theologians but as they became remote from society, the role of moral custodian has been taken over by poets and novelists and not philosophy, which lost its privileged position in society. In fact, as analytic philosophy became more remote from main stream culture, people turned to Oriental Philosophy and books such as 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance', (Pirsig, 1976).

There have been three main philosophers who have influenced Rorty, namely, Wittgenstein (1974), Dewey (Flew, 1971), and Heidegger (1983). They abandoned a theory of representation as they believed that the mind was not a special area of study. In rejecting the *raison d'être* of traditional philosophy they presented a new terrain to explore.

Rorty explores this new terrain by first of all rejecting the notion of essentialism. What is meant by the term 'essentialism' is the task of determining a finite list of characteristics that can

be used to ascertain whether something belongs to a defined group. In other words, what would count for something to be an 'x', for example, truth or morality? Rossiter's (2001) article 'What is Marketing Knowledge? Stage I: forms of marketing knowledge' is an example of essentialism. His approach is that of an empiricist, based on a form of realism. Rossiter (2001) draws a distinction between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge, with the development of the former being the goal of the marketing discipline. He attempts to synthesize marketing knowledge into four distinct categories, namely marketing concepts, structural frameworks, strategic principles, and research principles.

However, for Rorty, the attempt to find a finite set of characteristics is based on the Cartesian desire to establish the foundation of knowledge. According to Rorty (1982), analytical philosophers want to search for the final vocabulary, which would anchor all other vocabularies. This can be related back to the Cartesian quest for certainty. But for Rorty there is no god's eye view to allow adjudication between competing knowledge claims, therefore there is no correspondence between our knowledge and the world. Instead there is only a specific situated perspective based on the restraint of habit and context. Following on from this, specific norms and justifiable ends of enquiry are the foundation for rationality within a community of language users.

This relates to the notion of paradigms. Competing paradigms consequently determine fundamentally different objects of enquiry. This means that Rorty's idea of objectivity is based on his notion of 'final vocabularies', in other words, a paradigm, which in turn leads to the notion of objectivism, whereby an a historical, permanent framework can be used to determine the nature of rationality, truth, and reality. Rorty challenges this view and rejects the objective/subjective dichotomy as it is designed to parallel the fact and value distinction developed by the positivists. According to Rorty (1989) it would appear that the distinction creates more difficulties than it resolves.

Therefore it follows, for Rorty, that any talk about metaphysics is illegitimate and foolish. He believes that it is necessary to return to Socrates and learn to listen, talk and weigh the consequences of what is discussed. This activity involves moral virtues and has nothing to do with epistemological or metaphysical quests.

Rorty wants to incorporate the linguistic turn and postmodernism into his exposition on the history of philosophy. Rorty's different view of philosophy is based on neo-pragmatism.

Whilst Richard Rorty has brought neo-pragmatism into the limelight other major philosophers have also given credence to the school of thought, namely, the American philosophers Hilary Putnam and Richard Bernstein.

Building on Classical Pragmatism, Rorty takes a socio-historical approach and rejects the notion that it is possible ever to know the answers to the classical philosophical questions. Therefore he is not interested in questions such as the relationship between language and reality, or what being qua being might encompass, or what counts to be a human being. He believes that gaining a broad overarching understanding of the way the world is constituted, especially about the nature of reality, is beyond our reach. This theme, that is, a distrust of human reason, is apparent in most postmodern writing. For Rorty, what counts as rational is dependent on different intellectual communities.

According to Rorty (1989) there are two senses of rationality. The first is when rationality is equated with method in the sense that criteria are determined in advance and the task is to work methodically through to a solution. Law and medicine are good examples of this approach but natural science is the quintessential example. However, another sense of rationality can be taken to mean 'sane' or 'reasonable'. For someone to be rational in this sense is to be able to discuss any topic which arises without resorting to dogma, ideology, or self-righteousness. Rorty claims that it is this second sense of rationality that needs to be adopted. 'We should avoid the idea that there is some special virtue in knowing in advance what criteria you are going to satisfy, in having standards by which to measure progress' (Rorty, 1989 p. 9).

Consequently, it is not a matter of justifying knowledge in terms of the relationship between the subject and reality as knowledge generation is a social phenomenon. So there is no court of appeal or something stable that can be consulted for final arbitration but only the community to which you belong. What is needed is coherence to norms and standards of particular rationalities. Consequently true or false statements are dependent on whether they confirm or contradict the rules of the community.

Therefore, the task is to take conversations seriously without asking for 'rational consensus' or to posit the inquiry as a means of finding the so-called 'truth'. It weaves together theory and action to determine beliefs that clarify meaning and allow action to be seen as applicable for a given situation in a given context. This means that theory and action are intertwined, each modifying the other whilst at the same time maintaining their mutual relevance.

Rorty believes that we must accept the radical contingency of social practice that defines what we are, so the task is to develop a coping strategy by opening up dialogue and conversation. Therefore, a practical-moral vision drives his work.

As discussed, Rorty blurs the distinction between objective and subjective as well as fact and value. Instead, he leaves room for alternative narratives and promotes intellectual tolerance. What this means is that, at a basic level, what is considered is a course of action and its observable consequences. Furthermore, it is the sum of these consequences that forms the meaning of the action. Therefore, pragmatism is a method for evaluating philosophical problems by working through the practical consequences. Creation and construction are privileged over discovery and objective description.

Rorty rejects analytical philosophy and rejects the need for epistemology, as it is concerned with finding the foundations of knowledge. By rejecting epistemology Rorty collapses theory and practice, and argues for a philosophical approach based on practical reason and its consequences. However, if epistemology is to be replaced, the question arises as to what will take its place. Rorty adopts hermeneutics as the basis for understanding the world.

Hermeneutics is concerned with not only finding meaning in actions, be it an individual or an organisation, but also in developing understanding. Hermeneutics involves the interpretation of not only overt signs such as conversation and texts, but also non-lingual expressions, for example, body language, so that an understanding of tacit knowledge is gained (Gummesson, 2003). The art of textual interpretation has its origins in jurisprudence and theology. When interpreting complex constructs, such as symbolic representations, the relative situational and historical context needs to be taken into account. However, the researcher's own historical and situational context must also be acknowledged as it influences any translation or interpretation (Steffy & Grimes, 1986).

Also, hermeneutics opposes scientism (Bernstein, 1983). As has been noted, scientism is a modernistic penchant to view the natural sciences as a base for all areas of experience and enquiry, and is normative to all knowledge generation. The overarching goal is to find historical concepts that apply in all possible worlds. But hermeneutics challenges the proposition that scientific inquiry is the only means of knowledge generation.

According to Carr (2002), there are three basic types of hermeneutic approaches, as follows. The first is methodological hermeneutics, which claims that the social sciences require a

different methodology from the natural sciences. Consequently, it is impossible to 'objectify' the social world. There is a difference between knowledge derived from explanation and knowledge derived from understanding, with the latter requiring different methods. An example of this type of hermeneutics is work by Hatch and Rubin (2006), whereby they develop a hermeneutic theory of branding, which allows them to trace how a brand's meaning changes over time. Such an understanding allows managers to increase the brand's potential.

The second type, critical hermeneutics, is associated with the work of Habermas (1977), where he claims that method and ontology are not sufficient in themselves to explain social behaviour. Habermas made a critique of Gadamer, based on a Hegelian-Marxist tradition, as he believed it lacked an explicit critical function. He was also sceptical of the universalistic claims made by hermeneutics. He argues that an adequate social science theory must involve an interpretative or hermeneutical dimension. From his point of view what is needed is a theory of communication competence as social interactions are mediated through language and is a means to determine ideology and types of domination and repression. 'Against Gadamer, who intended to contrast scientific method with the hermeneutical phenomenon, Habermas argued for the necessity of a dialectical synthesis of empirical-analytic science and hermeneutics into a critical theory that has a practical intent and is governed by an emancipatory cognitive interest' (Bernstein, 1983, p. 43).

Habermas wanted to include the notions of work and power, as well as Gadamer's notions of language and communication, as part of a social theory. In developing his social theory Habermas attempted to create a transcendental standpoint. This is in contrast to Rorty who claims that a permanent framework is not needed.

The third type is that of ontological hermeneutics where understanding is seen as part of being in the world. In other words, ontological hermeneutics refers to the nature of human beings, where one is always in a mode of attempting to understand (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). One of the early philosophers to draw attention to the ontological significance of hermeneutics was Heidegger. He claimed that hermeneutics was universally applicable. Heidegger believed that people were 'thrown' into the world and are always working towards their future and in doing so, human beings are a species who understand and interpret. Therefore, it is necessary to understand 'understanding' as it pervades all our activities.

Heidegger captured the word 'Dasein' to articulate what being in the world meant. Hermeneutics is an interpretation of Dasein as words show something beyond themselves, namely 'being' that needs to be comprehended. Richard Rorty (1979), following Gadamer (1975), bases his neo-pragmatism on ontological hermeneutics.

Within ontological hermeneutics there are three stages, namely preunderstanding, understanding and application (Bernstein 1983). Preunderstanding is about the knowledge that is brought to the research project before the enquiry begins, therefore, the researcher must acknowledge that they are a historically produced entity with certain biases. Understanding arises from the result of the research so the context and situation of the data collection must be considered. Hermeneutics is not trying to explain how the world operates but is attempting to grasp an understanding of social problems and explain how they can be solved. In this view, the individual constitutes what is in the world. Understanding is pre-judged, in other words, social actors have prejudices that they bring prior to understanding any problem. So knowledge does not grow but people understand differently. 'Hermeneutic understanding is in part self-understanding, self-reflection, and self-development' (Arnold and Fischer, 1994, p. 59).

The openness of the future means that it is impossible to know for certain. Over time actors try to make sense of what has been experienced. 'We understand differently but remain uncertain. Learning does not remove uncertainty about what will happen in the future, nor does it remove doubt about what has happened as the past is always a matter of interpretation' (Addleson, 1996, p. 34). The final stage, application, involves practical judgment but in doing so the researcher needs to think about the relationship between theory and history, in so much as any theory is contextually based (Steffy & Grimes, 1986).

For Gadamer, interpretation is involved in hermeneutics and the notion of interpretation is based on some beliefs about ourselves. Human beings are able to pre-conceive issues. Such prejudgement is based on the idea that we are beings engaged in interpretative understanding. The recognition of our prejudices enables us to understand and hermeneutical understanding is constitutive of what we are in the process of becoming. For hermeneutics, there is no distinction or difference between understanding and interpretation.

The above discussion raises a question about the concept of prejudice. For Gadamer, prejudice needs to be seen as 'prejudgement' rather than something that is negative, unfounded and false. All knowledge involves prejudgements and as such, these must be tested. There are

two basic types of prejudices, namely blind and enabling, and they can be determined by art, texts, and traditions (Bernstein, 1983).

Prejudices give rise to the notion of “belongingness”, which is like having an affinity with something. Humans are always influenced by our being ‘thrown’ into our world. This links to the issue regarding traditions. It is traditions which shape us and come alive when freely appropriated. All understanding is projective and is based on three important fields, namely tradition, now, and the future.

According to Bernstein (1983), two important concepts arise from the above discussion. First is the concept of the effective-historical consciousness and the second is the fusion of horizons. The former relates to prejudices and how they are linked with tradition, whereas the latter is about the ranges of vision that is possible, which is dependent on one’s standpoint. Such a vantage point is finite and limited but it is possible to move beyond it. This means that one is never bound to one standpoint as it is always possible to move to another vantage point. Fusion happens when one tries to understand another horizon. When this happens one becomes both endorsed as an individual and enriched, but at the same time testing one’s prejudices.

As has been intimated in the above sections, the concept of understanding is important for Gadamer (Bernstein, 1983). He believes that nothing is, in principle, beyond understanding. It is the basic mode of being, having ontological status and also being a universal concept. There is a link between understanding and language. It is through language that we articulate or comprehend our understanding. Language is the medium in which we live so is not just an instrument that is used.

Following on from the above, Gadamer’s aim is to expose the false dichotomy of thinking in terms of objectivism and relativism and show how our views are distorted when this dichotomy is imposed on our thinking.

An important concept within hermeneutics is that of the hermeneutical circle, which claims that in order to ‘understand’ one must ‘foreunderstand’, and this involves anticipation and contextualization. One can only know what one is prepared to know. Therefore, the hermeneutical circle is about understanding the whole of the text by the parts of the text. There is a movement back and forth between the parts and the whole. In other words to understand an issue or problem one goes from local detail to global structure. One is able to validate the circle, that is, the whole, by an appeal to the parts (Bernstein, 1983).

This approach is in contrast to the positivists who want to break out of the circle and find a touchstone so that it can be determined which or what readings of a text are correct. But the hermeneutics position argues that there can be no empirical verification based on ‘superficial’ data.

Given that the main thrust of hermeneutics understands, it is now necessary to see how the concept relates to Praxis. Understanding is linked with interpretation and application and the three terms are integrated, forming the basis of *phronesis*. Knowledge, therefore, is not detached from the observer but is a constituted part of his/her praxis. According to Aristotle (1970), in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, there are three intellectual virtues. The first, *episteme*, is scientific knowledge, which consists of deduction from basic principles. ‘*Episteme* is highly self-contained because it is deployed mainly in theoretical discourses themselves. Although *episteme* obviously is not as self-contained activity, it aims to remove as many concrete empirical referents as possible in order to obtain the status of general truth’ (Greenwood and Levin, 2005 p. 50). This means that *episteme* is closely linked to theory development. The second virtue is *techne*, which can be considered as craft knowledge, in other words, how to make things. The task is to make better designs for living, thus increasing human happiness. The third virtue, *phronesis*, is practical wisdom which involves knowing what is good for human beings in general and applying such knowledge to particular situations. According to Tsoukas and Cummings (1997), Aristotle views *phronesis* as the highest intellectual virtue.

Praxis is concerned with activity and based on Aristotle’s distinction between praxis and *phronesis*, where the former is about action in a particular situation and the latter is about morals dispositions, which directs praxis (Bernstein, 1983). Therefore, praxis involves the interaction of judgement and action.

According to Bernstein (1983), praxis allows for the mediation between the universal and the particular, involving practical judgement which involves deliberation and choice. Praxis involves choice and judgement about practical issues in concrete situations. This leads to the notion of informal action, which is the ability to coherently explain and understand situations where judgements are made. In summary, we are dialogical beings, always in conversation with either ourselves or other beings, concerned with the process of understanding.

Tsoukas and Cummings (1997), outline three reasons as to why practical wisdom is important. First, marketing decisions change over time, therefore new problems will require

flexible and imaginative responses. Applying rules and guidelines that were useful in the past does not guarantee success in the future. Second, practical matters are indeterminate and ambiguous, so the solution will depend on one's purpose. Finally, often each decision is unique so the decision maker needs to treat the case accordingly. Therefore, each act is dependent on a given context. 'The actor needs to make sense of the context to enable appropriate actions' (Greenwood and Levin, 2005 p. 51). Consequently, praxis, that is, practical judgement, does not occur independently, but is an integral part of a given situation.

MARKETING-AS-PRACTICE

The notion of practical wisdom has relevance for the discipline of marketing, with its emphasis on choice and decision making. As has been argued, marketing's objective detachment based on economic theory, where the generalities are valued over and above the contextual, the quantitative over the qualitative, is challenged. In contrast, neo-pragmatism, based on the linguistic turn, is an affirmative postmodernism which allows for a more intimate relationship with the subjects under review, so it is possible to view what people do, rather than understand marketing decisions at the firm level. With an emphasis on practice, a new approach can be termed 'marketing-as-practice'. Practice theory attempts to bridge the gap between 'societism', where the emphasis is on large social forces, and 'individualism', where the emphasis is on individual actors (Schatzki, 2005). Practice theory emphasises individual's activity in practice. Therefore, the researcher is looking at not just what is done, but how it is done. Such an approach follows on from developments in other academic areas, such as strategy (Whittington, 2003 & 2006; Jarzabkowski, 2009), science studies, gender studies, and organizational studies (Reckwitz, 2002).

Marketing-as-practice is about the doing of marketing, so the focus is on how individuals think, speak, politicise and routinely interact within the work place (Bakir, 2010). The phenomena under investigation needs to be understood within the social context the interactions are enacted. By studying who does it, how and why, one is able to decide the implications for marketing. In most marketing theory there appears to be an absence of actors and how their actions, emotions, and motivations shape marketing. The marginalization of the actor has been attributed to the dominant micro-economic approach to marketing research. A broader constructivist view attempts to break the dominant position of marketing theory based on micro-economics, by emphasising social complexity and causal ambiguity.

Marketing-as-practice involves three broad interrelated parameters, namely practices, practitioners and praxis. Praxis is seen as comprising activities that link the micro actions of individuals and groups with the wider institutions where the actions take place. Reckwitz (2002) makes a distinction, within social theory, between something that guides activity and the activity itself. Praxis is used to describe what people do, that is, the actual activity. This needs to be seen, however, with the context of practices, that is, the shared routines of behaviour, including norms, traditions and procedures. Finally, praxis and practices are carried out by practitioners, for example, brand managers, account executives, marketing managers, etc.

Performance, in the sense of the activities undertaken by a marketing practitioner, becomes important. The roles of such practitioners can be understood within the context in which they operate. This includes marketing managers, brand managers, advertising consultants, market researchers, etc. Also, their skills can be analysed, as well as an understanding of how the work is organised, and processes that are undertaken. Additional to the above is the question of what tools are utilised and what frameworks and concepts are used. The political dimension also needs to be taken into account when viewing marketing-as-practice.

The paper argues that the marketing discipline faces a number of challenges. Marketing academics have attempted to address these challenges by offering different paradigms and new frameworks, for example, relationship marketing, but they have not realised that the crises are caused, in part, by the dominant ontological and epistemological commitment that pervades the discipline. By embracing the linguistic turn and adopting neo-pragmatism, with its emphasis on ontological hermeneutics and praxis, the nature of enquiry turns to marketing-as-practice. By building the discipline by concentrating on marketing-as-practice, the challenges outlined in the first section of the paper dissipate.

If the field of marketing-as-practice is explored, the discipline is able to ring-fence the area of marketing by exploring the unique activities associated with marketing praxis, practices, and practitioners. This will stem the encroachment of the marketing arena by other disciplines, as what marketers do is unique to marketing.

Secondly, by concentrating on marketing-as-practice, consumer behaviour becomes an auxiliary to the marketing endeavour, in the same way that concepts and frameworks from economics and accounting are used by marketers when the need arises. Therefore, consumer behaviour should be seen as a separate discipline, pursuing its own agenda, which may not

necessarily be linked to marketing. By being independent, consumer behaviour can take a wider, non-managerial perspective, and critique marketing activity and its link with consumerism. Three important works are worth mentioning as examples. First, George Ritzer's (1996), 'The McDonaldization of society: an investigation into the changing character of contemporary social life', referring to shopping malls as 'cathedrals of consumption'. Second, Colin Campbell's (1987) book, 'The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism' indicates how romanticism is linked with consumerism and that it is through consumption that the 'self' is able to gain expression. The third book is Arlie Hochschild's (1983), 'The Managed Heart: commercialization of human feeling', which is a study of the adaptation of emotions for commercial purposes, for example, airline cabin crew.

As has been noted, the gap between academic endeavour and practice interest has widened, mainly due to practitioners not understanding the academic episteme and finding most of the research trite. With an emphasis on marketing-as-practice, practitioners will become more interested in research as it pertains to what they do in the work place. It is argued that they will benefit from reading articles which give them insights and understanding, thereby increasing their professional abilities. As has been noted, marketing is an applied discipline with one of its main constituents being practitioners. It is apposite that their activities are researched and the context made explicit, so transfer of learning can take place.

Finally, whilst the distinction between postmodernism as a cultural analysis and postmodernism as a philosophical position has been outlined, it needs to be remembered that the two concepts are interrelated. Neo-pragmatism is an affirmative postmodernism philosophy which accentuates context and divergent possibilities. Such a position can explore the postmodern condition as it pertains to how marketing is done.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Given that the main thrust of research for marketing-as-practice is that of praxis, based on neo-pragmatism, the question needs to be addressed regarding the implications for research.

The first implication is that science is seen as being no different from other forms of knowledge generation, such as art, poetry or music. This means that praxis can be understood from a number of sources, not just research based on the evaluation criteria as postulated by the

empiricists. For instance, a novel may give insights to understanding about markets, exchanges, and marketing relationships that can be useful for purposeful dialogue.

The second point is that the anti-foundational position outlined means that research is not about seeking the truth, in the sense of grounded knowledge. The logical-empiricist approach has been about finding the right methodology by concentrating on technique. In contrast, neo-pragmatism is not concerned about methodology but gaining insights which are useful.

Finally, neo-pragmatism is concerned with finding material so that praxis can be understood. Such an understanding means that insights into practical actions are obtained, not in a grounded sense, but in the sense that what might work. Research would involve observing practitioners at work and attempting to understand their performance. This means the analysis is at the individual or a team level, rather than at an organisational level. With marketing-as-practice the accent is on discussion to create new ideas and concepts. Therefore, the marketing academic will look at responses to marketing dilemmas to gain insights and topics for discussion. This means that case studies and other means of gathering insights into such dilemmas, such as discourse theory, narrative theory and grounded theory, will be utilised. The main focus is investigating what happens in the market place, for example, what marketing managers do rather than do research to find what they should do on a prescriptive basis. This would mean that research would provide rich descriptions, which would provide understanding and give insights, allowing for the notion of transferability, which is an indicator of applicability (O'Leary, 2004).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Brown (1996) has argued that marketing is an applied discipline and therefore the primary audience is practitioners in the form of students. Schön in the 'Reflective Practitioner' (1983) is interested in the way practitioners undertake decision making. He believes that 'technical-rationality', that is the application of scientific theories to instrumental problems, is based on a positivist epistemology and as such, has failed to resolve the dilemma between rigour versus relevance that is faced by practitioners. Schön believes that technical-rationality does not take into account the uniqueness of the situation.

He makes a distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The former involves taking account of previous experiences, connecting with our intuition and utilising our theories in use. From this process new understanding is gained to influence the managers'

actions. Schön believes it is not a matter of following a set practice, outlined in a textbook, as every case is unique.

Reflection-on-action is done after the decision has been made, and occurs often when talking with co-workers and supervisors. This is where reflective thought occurs and allows the practitioner to build up a repertoire of images, ideas and examples. Therefore, the objective of the neo-pragmatist teacher is to invoke the notion of sensemaking, which is, according to Weick (1995), the ability to look back retrospectively allowing a person to construct an understanding of events and consequently give it meaning. This involves the person invoking explicit and implicit mental processes to be able to construct and frame so as to have a perspective of an event or situation.

Therefore, the task of teaching marketing will be the exploring of cases and ideas, but context will be the most important issue. To explore different contexts the teaching will need to give examples and seek dialogue with the students to contextualise the information. For example, discussing critical success factors for an industry is one way to lead such a discussion so that students understand contextual setting.

Another important change is the move away from prescriptive models. As has been cited in the previous section, marketing has used planning models with an emphasis on one size fitting all occasions. The task of the teacher is not to prescribe what the students need to do, but for the students to develop their own praxis. The important outcome for the student is not to understand how to use a prescribed model, but to develop their own dialogue and gain understanding. Therefore, in class it will be about contextualising the issue and discussing alternatives, but not with any definitive answer grounded in foundational knowledge. In a complex postmodern world the student needs to produce cases, rather than consume them, thereby allowing them to develop a scenario and act as if they were practitioners. This is in contrast to the Harvard business type cases, where the author has taken a position of authority and written in a clinical, straight-forward style, where a problem or issue is presented and the CEO is often presented as a hero, from which students are expected to learn and draw generalisations from the case.

Given the above scenario, the teacher moves from defining concepts and frameworks in terms of their essential characteristics, to determining their applicability in given situations. This entails a move from making assertions of a generalisable nature to invoking the notion of transferability. Can the lessons from the case be applied to different settings? For this to happen,

a highly detailed description of the research context must be given so the student can decide upon the applicability of the concept, theory, or framework.

From a teaching point of view we need to understand not only marketing in an abstract sense, but also from an individual practitioner's point of view. Therefore, according to Whittington the lecture also becomes a coach. 'Practical teaching requires the mutual exploration of difficulties, rather than the unidirectional imparting of knowledge; it demands reflection and experiment in the flow of practice, rather than just episodic prescription in the classroom' (Whittington, 1996, p.733). Therefore, students need to understand and appreciate the skills, responsibilities and challenges involved in marketing decision making, and the interplay between the actors involved in the process. So a case is not just about what should company X do but how could Y and Z perform better?

CONCLUSION

In summary, it is argued that neo-pragmatism, based on the linguistic turn in modern philosophy, overcomes the problems associated with logical empiricism, and provides a new approach for the marketing discipline. It is argued that such an approach dissipates some of the challenges facing the marketing discipline, namely the encroachment of the marketing arena by other disciplines, the role of consumer behaviour, the academic practitioner gap, and the postmodern condition. By adopting a research protocol based on ontological hermeneutics, coupled with praxis, a new marketing domain can be investigated, namely marketing-as-practice, which is about the doing of marketing, so the focus is on how individuals think, speak, politicise and routinely interact within the work place. Such an approach has implications for research and teaching.

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