

Definitions, Domains, Directions

The following text is an excerpt from a chapter (Shultz in press), forthcoming in *Explorations of Marketing in Society*, a tome organized by the American Marketing Association and Thomson Publishing, and edited by Bill Wilkie, Greg Gundlach and Lauren Block. Much of that chapter explores definitions, domains, genesis and evolution, and future directions for macromarketing. Several questions pertinent to these issues have been raised at conferences that I recently have attended. The following synopsis therefore may be helpful to scholars less familiar with macromarketing.

Introduction

Marketers and marketing institutions increasingly are under pressure to address society's problems, conflicting interests, and the reciprocal effects of marketing on society and society on marketing. In other words, the world is (re)turning to macromarketing. Macromarketing literally deals with big/important issues, beyond comparatively simple exchanges between buyers and sellers, or even relationships between companies and customers. In a more interconnected world of markets, marketers, and their stakeholders, macromarketing is an important mechanism to study both opportunities and shortcomings of marketing, and both its intended positive effects and unintended deleterious effects. This suggests macromarketing includes an optimistic perspective; that it seeks functional mechanisms to enhance marketing processes, to the benefit of the largest number of stakeholders, the world over.

Definition

The definition of macromarketing can vary depending upon one's source, but essentially, macromarketing is differentiated by its focus on aggregations and systems, and the way marketing processes within them affect and are affected by those systems and the society in which they function. For example, Bartels and Jenkins (1977) suggested:

“(M)acromarketing” should connote an aspect of marketing which is “larger” than what is otherwise considered....It has meant the marketing process in its entirety, and the *aggregate* mechanism of institutions performing it. It has meant systems and *groups* of micro institutions, such as channels, conglomerates, industries, and associations, in contrast to their individual component units...the social context of micromarketing, its role in the national economy, and its application to the marketing of noneconomic goods. It has also meant the *uncontrollable environment* of micro firms (p. 17).

Similarly, Hunt (1981) suggested

...macromarketing is a multidimensional construct, (which) refers to the study of (1) marketing systems, (2) the impact and consequence of marketing systems on society, and (3) the impact and consequence of society on marketing systems (p. 8; see also Hunt, 1977)

Fisk (1981) added that (macro)marketing should be viewed as social process, as (1) a life-support system provisioning technology, with concerns about (2) quality and quantity of life-goals served by marketing,

(3) a technology for mobilizing and allocating resources and (4) is concerned about the consequences of marketing—the spillover effects of marketing—for those who may not seek or be aware of the intended or unintended activities of marketers (pp. 3, 4, 5) (see also Dixon, 1979; Shawver and Nickels, 1979).

The Domain of Macromarketing

The macromarketing domain is illuminated in the context of perspectives and historical development, and then six key topics.

Perspectives and Historical Development

The ideas and interests central to macromarketing have been with us for Millennia. *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Thucydides, 1972 [431~424 B.C.]), the *Magna Carta* (Danziger and Gillingham, 2004), and *The Travels* (Marco Polo, 1958 [circa late 13th Century]) provide just three examples of works in which trade, markets, marketing and concerns for societal welfare were themes. Macromarketers regularly delve into such literature, because they find it intrinsically interesting, but also because they believe there are important lessons germane to modern marketing scholarship and practice.

Macromarketing *practice* moreover is perhaps as old as society itself. Societies emerged for the welfare of the group; the need for specialization and then exchanges of items produced by specialists surely was evident early-on. Greater specialization and support for it begat trade. Eventually markets—which linked many systems in any given society, from production to consumption—were an efficient mechanism to sustain a society, which, fundamentally is a series of institutions and systems agreed upon by the members of the group. One would reasonably presume the first markets—imagine the ancient agora in Athens or a bazaar in the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia—must have necessitated systemic organization and coordination, bringing people together in ways to facilitate exchanges and, on balance, improving society (see also Lane, 1991; and McMillan, 2002, p. 4, who hints the oldest discovered artifact of written language may be a marketing transaction, scratched in baked clay, circa 3000 B.C.).

Within the modern marketing literature, macromarketing *orientations* were evident early in the 20th century. Sheth and Gardner (1982) suggest “the first school of marketing thought (was) *macromarketing*,” a focus on problems and potential of marketing activities from a more societal perspective, rather than from the firm’s perspective (p. 53).¹ More explicit glimpses of academic macromarketing were evident in textbooks written by Breyer (1934), and Vaile, Grether and Cox (1952). Their macro orientation became a cornerstone at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and was further developed by Alderson (1957).

A more prescribed macromarketing *concept* seems to have emerged between the late 1950s and mid 1960s (e.g., Holloway and Hancock, 1964; Grether and Holloway, 1967; Slater, 1968). Fisk’s (1967) text on *Marketing Systems* presented a detailed macrosystems perspective, including chapters on Evolution of Marketing Systems (historical analysis), Characteristics of Marketing Systems (Micro and Macro system

¹ See also Bartels (1965); Wilkie and Moore (1999; 2003); contributions by Ely (1903), Shaw (1916) and Schumpeter (1934), for example, also come to mind (cf. Jones and Moniesen, 1990).

characteristics), Resource Allocation by Competition and the Expanding Role of Government (aggregate system constraints), and Social Performance of Marketing and Comparative Marketing (Fisk, 2004).

Macromarketing therefore is integral to society and its welfare. Despite this assertion and complexities and dangers that have accelerated in the last half century, marketing scholars ironically have become more atomistic, potentially distancing themselves from important societal contributions. This trend has raised some concerns in the academy,² which in turn may portend a shift back to a macromarketing focus by marketing scholars. Some substantiation of this assertion is provided by the recent inclusion of “stakeholders” in the latest definition of marketing proffered by the AMA.

In summary, marketing began because it added value to societies, and markets and the systems of which they were part emerged and thrived, because, though not flawless, they were superior to most (all?) other social institutions as a provisioning mechanism. They are among the oldest institutions that affect and are affected by society; they are among the first institutions restored in the wake of societal destruction (e.g., Shultz et al., 2005). Macromarketing addresses these complex and multi-faceted relationships by examining marketing and society, marketing systems, marketing history, marketing phenomena in the aggregate, and marketing’s effects on quality of life.

Macromarketing Today

Today, macromarketing continues to morph, to draw new and diverse followers, and thus it defies neat boundaries, descriptors, and limitations. With its growth and maturation have come new directions in the forms of sub-disciplines, as described (by the section editors on the *Journal’s* webpage).

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² A special session at the 2003 AMA Summer Educators’ Conference, for example, assembled many leading marketing scholars who lamented the increasingly micro and concomitantly inconsequential focus of marketing scholarship.

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