MARKETING IDEOLOGY: LEGITIMACY AND LEGITIMIZATION

Early draft

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Abstract

The analysis of marketing ideology is supported by the distinction between legitimacy and legitimization. Marketing ideology is defined as a relatively stable set of arguments that provide legitimacy to marketers and market economy. However it does not preclude contradictions and the dissenting voice of criticism. Then marketing ideology produces also legitimization to lessen the tensions between the marketer’s claim to legitimacy and other people’s belief in this legitimacy. The role of criticism is to doubt the effectiveness of the production of legitimization by marketing ideology.

Keywords: Marketing ideology, Legitimacy, Legitimization, Criticism
To create and develop markets, firms need a rather large population of marketers: full-time professionals (brand managers, marketing directors, ad people...), part-time professionals (engineers, technical sales reps, key account managers...), professionals around them (market researchers, consultants, package and product designers...) and marketing academics to teach marketing management. To practice marketing marketers need principles and tools as well as good reasons to be committed to their job and to justify their activities around them. Marketing ideology is the relatively stable set of arguments accounting for the marketer's commitment to marketing management. Its primary function is to help marketers to maintain their ability to meet the demands of their occupation, while the function of criticism is to underline the tensions to which people in the marketers' role are subject. We are going to define marketing ideology, then to analyse critically some pieces of legitimation.

**Marketing ideology: definition and functions**

Most marketing historians agree that marketing discipline can be dated to the turn of the twentieth century (Hollander *et. al.*, 2005). However, as a field of study, marketing has not always been viewed from a management perspective. A distinct view of marketing, as a management discipline rather than an economic activity, emerged in the 1950s (Wilkie and Moore, 2003; Webster, 2005). The post-World War II marketplace offered huge business opportunities and the practice of market segmentation gained widespread acceptance (Cohen, 2003). During the 1950s and 1960s the most notable developments were the publication of several statements of the marketing concept (Drucker, 1954, McKitterick, 1957, Keith, 1960, Levitt, 1960), the growth of marketing staffs, the development of the product/brand management form of organization and the appearance of influential textbooks with a managerial focus: Howard, 1957, McCarthy, 1960, Kotler, 1967. These managerial texts produced a consensus definition of marketing strategy decisions as the four Ps. They also produced and disseminated marketing ideology.

Marketing ideology refers to marketing ideas, i.e. marketing thought and not marketing practice. However this distinction is somewhat problematic because business people create most of the innovations in business practice. Therefore marketing though is intertwined with marketing practice. Marketing is a "performative science", conceptualizing and enacting market economy at the same time, a body of expertise that simultaneously describes and constructs its subject matter (Cochoy, 1998).

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1 This word is coined on Austin's notion of performative utterance in linguistic: those speech acts which perform the action the sentence describes, that simultaneously say and do what they say: "I now pronounce you man and wife", "I declare the meeting open".
In this paper we look at marketing ideas through the most cited authors and articles in the first chapter of marketing textbooks –especially Kotler’s– and through marketing definitions codified by the AMA (American Marketing Association) from the 1950s (Mc Kitterick, 1957) to 2005 (AMA web page). This choice in not at random: the eleventh editions of Kotler’s textbook are the worldwide reference for “classical” marketing and AMA is the world largest professional association. Both contributions can be considered as the mainstream marketing doctrine.

The formalization and dissemination of marketing principles and tools led to the construction of marketing professions reinforcing the need and presence of marketers in the economy². Moreover the extreme generalization of marketing vocabulary shows the pervasiveness of marketing ideas in our society. Their imprints are found in the constant use by all sorts of actors in every kind of situation of the metaphors of segmentation, targeting and positioning (Marion, 2004). It is today a set of collective representations (perspectives, frame of reference, viewpoints, worldview…) shared by more and more people in numerous countries.

The new definition of marketing, as released by the AMA in 2004, is:

“Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.”

Marketing’s core activities being “a set of processes for creating communicating […] delivering […] and managing” these processes need committed people belonging to “an organizational function” to do the job. We argue that this people needs good reasons that justify their commitment to marketing and renders this commitment attractive and stimulating (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). We call these justifications marketing ideology.

Marketing ideology works as the collective action frame of marketers helping them to maintain their ability to meet the demands of their occupation. As justifications of marketing action become more accepted and taken-for-granted, marketing practices become more institutionalized. The more compelling and convincing a justification supporting marketing practice is, the less the justification needs to be sustained in order to maintain the practice. Therefore, as marketing becomes more widely diffused and accepted the frequency and amount of justifications should decrease. Why then should a widely adopted practice such as marketing require justification to maintain its adoption? The answer is: criticism and resulting tensions.

² For United States, Wilkie & Moore (2003) gives some clues of the impact of this process from 1950 to 1980: AMA membership 4000 up to 17,000, 2 million business bachelor’s degrees, half million MBA degrees and 10,820 doctoral degrees in business.
Marketing ideology is useful for people playing the marketer’s role to alleviate the tensions to which they are subject. Following Sutton et al. (1956), three types of tension can be identified: 1) tensions stemming from criticism of the dominant position of successful and worldwide brands that can undermine the marketers’ belief that brand and market economy values are consistent with the general values of society, 2) tensions originating from the contradictory demands put to the marketer by different stakeholders (customers, stockholders, employees, government, etc.), 3) tensions deriving from the conflicting demands of other social roles that marketers (and especially women) must play outside the firm in family, community and various informal groups. Marketers adhere to their particular kind of creed\(^3\) to resolve emotional conflicts, overcome the doubts, and alleviate the anxieties engendered by the actions that their roles compel them to take.

Our hypothesis is that marketing ideology must incorporate a response to criticism if it wants marketers to remain legitimate. It is the “price to pay” if customers/consumers are to consider marketing activities—and firms which implement them—to be legitimate. Ideology produces legitimacy and legitimization (Chiapello, 2003). Legitimacy emphasizes those representations that, by ensuring a shared description of the world and enabling each person’s action, help to reinforce the stability of social order. An order constituted by conventions generally accepted in a society. Ideology produces also legitimization\(^4\) to those who are in a dominant position because there is always a *de facto* variance between the models that are assumed and concrete achievements. When this variance is neither detected nor criticized, those who are in a position of dominance enjoy excessive power. Then, their legitimacy claim is greater than the belief in their legitimacy. If ideology gives unity to a set of collective representations in return it does not preclude neither distortion nor contradiction.

**Marketing ideology produces legitimacy**

Marketing ideology produces legitimacy for marketing activities because it provides reasons to all market actors for accepting the way in which market economy is organized. The legitimacy of marketers stems from what those they interact with grant them by acknowledging their right to act: shoppers, customers and consumers as well as people in other departments of their company. Marketing ideology produces legitimacy insofar as those who are involved in consumer society believe in this legitimacy. It is providing answers to

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\(^3\) While I borrow “creed” from the religious lexicon, I tend not to get confused between the marketing ideological process and the religious process of belief. The former tries to connect its statements with scientific knowledge pretending to decipher reality, while the latter does not pretend to be connected with any scientific knowledge.

\(^4\) I select “legitimization” rather than “legitimation” to refer to the process whereby an entity is justifying its right to exist, while “legitimacy” is referring to cultural conformity rather than self-justification.
such questions as: what is consumption? What is a customer/consumer? What is market? What is competition? What are the consequences for the common good?

It refers frequently to the Wealth of Nations (Smith, 1776) in order to: 1) underline the man’s propensity to exchange “the general disposition to truck, barter, and exchange” (Book 1, Chapter II), 2) assert the logical priority of consumption over production and stress the necessary influence of consumers over producers “Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer.” (4, VIII), 3) use the “invisible hand” metaphor (4, II), 4) define the role of “self-interest” and/or “self-love” (1, II) and, 5) define the rules of competition and the role of “market price” (1, VII). It refers, more rarely, to The Theory of the Moral Sentiments (1759) in order to suggest that sympathy (1, 1, 1) is a foundation of customer orientation which asks marketers and salesman to place themselves, by imagination, in the consumer situation.

The customer/consumer is defined as the one who choose from among the offerings on the market in a more or less calculating way. A market is a place where every customer may purchase whatever part of the produce of other men’s talents. Because “no client means no business” competition will force marketers to either learn the best way to serve the market or go out of business. Competition, even if not pure and perfect, is the surest means for the customer/consumer to benefit from the best product at the best cost.

If the marketer does a good job its offers will sell very easily to customers: “He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires for them.” (Smith, 1776-1, II). However to serve customer/consumer has a cost. Yet the desire to please can be carried too far. Therefore the marketer must determine the breakeven point in order to achieve good profit by giving the customer/consumer what s/he wants. Then marketing management is the art of satisfying customers at a profit because “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.” (1,II).

As a whole, in market economy, everything that is beneficial for the individual is also beneficial for society and the one criteria for common good is the general growth of wealth, whatever or whoever the beneficiary. Moreover a free market and prospering consumption economy foster freedom and democracy.

Material progress, efficiency and effectiveness in satisfying needs, and the exercising of economic and political freedom constitute the first set of justifications from marketing ideology that produces strong legitimacy. This set emphasizes individual concerns and
interests as well as social and collective interests. The latter are the more powerful because, rather than focusing on individual interest, justifications supported with economic and political freedom produce moral legitimacy, the socially accepted norms and mores.

Marketing legitimacy is the generalized assumption that marketing actions are desirable and appropriate within the market economy. This legitimacy reflects the congruence between the behaviour of marketers and the shared beliefs of customers/consumers within the system of norms, values and definitions taken-for-granted in market economy. Taken-for-grantedness represents both the most subtle and the most powerful source of legitimacy.

**Marketing ideology produces legitimization**

Marketing ideology, insofar as one of its components is an awareness of fairness, acts as a constraint upon marketers’ actions. The above set of justifications refers to the common good. Therefore, marketers are required, as a minimum, to face the constraints of “true” competition and transparent information. Moreover, they would be “true” marketers if they act in accordance with two principles asserted by Adam Smith: consumption must be the end of economic activity, and consumers’ preferences must have a priority over the interests of the producer. Those principles being basic to the concept of consumers’ sovereignty in the market economy.

Marketers all praise competition but try to neutralize it when it touches them. Therefore criticism questions whether competition is always strong enough to force firms to cater fully to the market and whether it is reasonable to see the market as independent of firm actions? It argues that firms operating in competitive markets sometimes have a lot of room for following their own preferences. It asks for government regulation to strengthen the rights and powers of consumers and to protect the larger interest of society against unbridled marketing behavior. It strives to reveal the moral pretensions that hide realities such as power imbalance and to put more restraints on marketers.

Marketing ideology acts both as a justification for the marketing action and as a constraint on the marketing process. It legitimates market order and provides reasons for accepting marketers’ activities but it also constrains them. We could even say that it only provides legitimacy as it acts as a constraint upon it (Chiapello, 2003-10). Marketing ideology is a pool of justifications useful both for marketers and criticism.

**Some pieces of legitimization**

The concept of consumers' sovereignty is expressed in marketing literature in various way: the customer is king, is the final arbiter, is always right, has to be delighted, has to be
enchanted... To illustrate the marketing concept (Drucker, 1954) quotes a statement from the General Electric Company’s 1952 annual reports. This example would be considered by some marketing textbooks as the origin of the “new” marketing concept. This statement:

“introduces the marketing man at the beginning rather than at the end of the productive cycle and would integrate marketing into each phase of the business. Thus marketing, through its studies and research, will establish for the engineer, the designer and the manufacturing man what the customer wants in a given product, what price he is willing to pay, and where and when it will be wanted. Marketing would have authority in product planning, production scheduling and inventory control, as well as in the sales distribution and servicing of the product” (55).

In the same vein McKitterick (Manager of Marketing Research from the same General Electric Co.) states in 1957 that:

“the principal task of the marketing function [...] is not so much to be skilful in making the customer do what suits the interests of the business as to be skilful in conceiving and then making the business do what suits the interests of the customer.” (76).

Keith (1960), Executive Vice President, and a Director of Pillsbury Company, announces the marketing revolution and states that:

“Companies revolve around the customer not the other way around. [...] marketing will become the basic motivating force for the entire corporation. [...] When that stage of development is reached, the marketing revolution will be complete” (35, 38)

What are the lessons of these statements? 1) While the marketing concept is not new in the 1950s it received an ever increasing amount of attention from business executives, 2) identification and satisfaction of customer’s needs are the keys to prosperity. The preferences of consumers determine what shall be produced, the “king” (customer) requiring that her/his needs be satisfied. S/he will determine what and how much will be made, when it shall be made and what s/he will pay for it, 3) not only does the customer come first but also, through the marketing concept, the interests of firm and consumer align, 4) marketing must permeate all the areas of business. Without minimizing other areas marketing has been and is likely to be the most dynamic element. Through its studies and research, it will establish for the engineer, the designer and the manufacturing man what the customer wants in a given product. Then in the 1950s the marketing function broadens and marketers were more and more important within the management constellation. With the “new” marketing concept the legitimacy of marketing, as a practice and a function, was growing. Customer orientation became the logical basis for “good” profit in a consumer-sovereign economy: a commonsense philosophy taken-for-granted.
But the notion of consumers’ sovereignty is open to several meanings. It is precisely because there is room for interpretation that this notion can be used to produce legitimization and then can be critically evaluated: 1) it is true that consumption is the end of economic activity. Consumers preferences may be said, therefore, to have a logical “priority” over the other elements in the situation. Does it means that preferences on the side of demand are fundamentally and in principle more important than those on the side of supply?, 2) the marketing doctrine asserts that consumers’ preferences are independent and “autonomous” factors in the exchange situation, therefore marketers do not create needs. Does it means that marketing discipline is equipped with an indisputable theory of needs and can ignore the influence of marketers upon consumers’ preferences? 3) Does the consumer’s sovereignty going to receive a more complete expression through the generalization of marketing approach in all organization? 4) Is the norm of economic policy the maximization of consumer’s sovereignty in order to give the fullest expression to the will of people as consumers?

The priority of consumer preferences

Keith (1960) and Levitt (1960) developed the hypothesis that marketing-savvy executives during the 1950s discovered revolutionary new, sophisticated, more effective way to market products. This presentation of the doctrine imply that marketers, as the voice of the consumer, will have the authority in product planning, production scheduling and inventory control, as well as the sales, distribution and servicing of the product. Those marketing gurus cannot assert that sufficient demand could be created for any product that a firm decided to produce simply by salesmanship or advertising. But they cannot depict marketing as a low-profile function concerned mostly with distribution because it might be difficult to explain why firms spend so much money to study the potential markets for new goods or services and to advertise for such products. The marketing concept provides an interpretative schemata to solve this contradiction and legitimize marketing practices. Selectively framing the relationships between the firm and the market, it seeks prescriptions providing answers to “how to” questions: how to satisfy and delight the consumer? How to keep customers loyal? How to manage successful companies and organizations?

It entails that preferences on the side of demand are fundamentally and in principle more important than those on the side of supply. But the supply of products depends, as well, on the choices and preferences of the supplier. Marketers fully understand the firm’s preference: to be in position where it can dominate its customers and suppliers by virtue of direct or indirect competitors’ weaknesses. Of course consumers demand schedules may influence the flow of production but the ultimate power –i.e. the “sovereignty”– rests not with
consumers as such but as the result of a compromise of interests through buyer/seller interaction: “Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want” (Smith, 1776-1, II). Firms and consumers interests do not align through the magic of the marketing concept. Any market exchange is a compromise of interests and, for a customer, to accept a compromise does not equate to being delighted. Moreover it is always difficult to disentangled the relationships between customer orientation and environmental characteristics (competitive intensity, market and technological turbulences) and what it means to be customer or market-oriented continue to evolve. Is it a market-driven strategy (which means learning understanding and responding to the market) or a market-driving strategy which means changing the market and leading customers’ needs in new directions.

Anybody sharing some experience of buyer/seller’s relationships knows very well that “compromise of interests” is a fair description of market exchange. But this is not enough for marketing advocates asserting consumers’ sovereignty. They need the clarity of compelling and convincing justifications to avoid equivocation and ambiguity in order to suspend disbelief and achieve marketing concept taken-for-grantedness. Therefore they argue that companies should be customer driven in everything they undertake and they assert the exogeneity of customer needs and wants: “Given the customer’s needs, the industry develops backwards, first concerning itself with the physical delivery of customer satisfactions.” (Levitt, 1960-80); “New product ideas are conceived after careful study of her wants and needs” (Keith, 1960-37);

The creation of needs

Drucker (1954) sates that “marketing alone does not make a business […] the second function of a business is […] innovation” (55). And innovation may take the form of a lower price, a better product or “the creation of a new want” (55). Drucker, as well as McKitterick, recognized that serving customers by itself would be insufficient to ensure long-term success. He spoke of creating rather than serving a customer (Berton, Hulbert and Pitt, 1999). This contradict the assumption of the doctrine regarding exogenous needs and wants.

In most textbooks clever marketing scholars, as they are aware of the controversy over whether needs can be created, try to solve the contradiction through the distinction between needs and wants. They assert that marketers do not create needs but just influences want along with others influencers in the society. They argue that needs can be expressed and/or latent and conclude that marketing does not create or invent needs but merely surfaces them.

What does marketing doctrine mean exactly by “latent” needs? Answers: latent means unexpressed, needs are latent until activated by marketers. Thus we are facing an
entity that by definition is impossible for buyers to articulate. But, where do latent needs come from? Mainstream economics cautiously assumes that needs are exogenous: an independent variable that should be explained by anything other than economic relations. However, the marketer is paid to open the “black-box” and marketing textbooks detail factors affecting the rational decision-making process of the buyer. But when marketing doctrine has to answer to the critic, it argues that latent needs are not constructed but “given”. In doing so it frees marketers from any mediation role and any responsibility. Moreover, needs appear as the starting point of the deductive approach provided by marketing doctrine. Needs are changing but do exist and are exogenous to marketer’s action. This certainty provides a self-confidence for the marketer’s action.

Of course there is no guarantee of success, for marketers can’t automate the production of customers and can’t manufacture consumer’s consent. But this is not the point, the issues are 1) what is the marketer’s contribution to the emerging process of needs? and, 2) what is the effect of an environment saturated with messages and devices exhorting individuals to consume?

Marketing does not acknowledge the last issue because it pays attention only to competing products and social spaces relevant to offerings and, on the demand side, to social groups engaged in an equally limited form of observation. It does not attend to the behaviour of the global system. However, marketers collectively contribute largely to economic change. They develop innovations by the creation of, for instance, the minivan, Walkman, Viagra or CNN. They influence, in so doing, consumer’s collective representations of objects (products, services, places…) as well as collective representations of consumers’ needs and motives. Before, George Eastman’s invention few people had had the goal of taking photographs. Kodak devised the notion of “amateur photography” and, in the same time, defined the object that would convince everybody to take photographs (Latour, 1987-115). Product innovation has the potential to engage people’s minds and imagination thus “to create a customer” (Drucker, 1954-52).

It is not a matter of coercion. Changes of values come from people themselves, but marketers change representations as to what is in line with consumer’s values. They provide goods, services, messages, atmospheres…, and consumers have to make sense of their resulting consumption experience. People attribute meanings to objects and these meanings reflect the collective representations to which they have been exposed and presently operate. People presume object to have specific meanings but they are always dependent
on the interpretation of others for the confirmation of the reality of their experience. Consumption experience is produced not by nature but by society and marketing practices.

Consumption meanings are historically constructed and marketers have long played a mediating role in this process and have occupied a central position in the market economy. They contribute to the development of a cult of innovation in which we honour the new over the enduring. It is not enough for firms to respond to changing markets. They need to actively influence the market —i.e. being capable of driving markets— rather than being only reactive to it. It’s possible that marketing, as a mercenary for anyone who can hire it, can be enlisted to oppose the habits it is accused of sustaining (demarketing?). It’s possible that marketing “science” is providing a neutral tool-box. But, marketers are paid to seek for new opportunities, to create markets and develop market shares, to create revenues from new customers buying products or services that yesterday they didn’t know they needed and today can’t live without. This is the power of marketing and when marketing gurus deny this power, marketing ideology produces legitimization, i.e. dissimulation and distortion.

The sense of progress

According to Keith (1960), there is a gradual developmental process of firms toward a customer/marketing orientation —seen as a progress implemented by enlightened firms. Moreover, economic/business history is conceived as a sequence of successive eras which place marketing as the end result of an irreversible process/progress. This periodization of production/sales/marketing/marketing control eras was based on evidence from a single company (Pillsbury) for which Keith was vice president and was based solely on his personal recollections (Marion, 1993). Thanks to Kotler, Keith’s periodization has become accepted wisdom in almost every principle textbook today. That status persists in spite of thorough and convincing historical scholarship that strongly contradicts it (Fullerton, 1988). This widely accepted history of the marketing concept is an oversimplification. It is an attempt to compress a complex role of events into catchy phrases. Thus it departs from the complexity of history and tries to emphasize one aspect of a multifaceted chain. Overall the marketing ideology sees marketing as moving from a crude state of intuitive action toward an increasingly informed and scientific discipline. The current and the future is viewed as superior to the past. Sometimes that progress is real but in the case of Keith eras it is overstated.

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5 “Diamond are Forever” campaign is an example of attempt to establish a new model (i.e. the De Beer’s model) for the “proper” conduct of the rituals of marriage and gift exchange. In fact diamond has not always served as the exclusive symbol of engagement. Most advertisements can usefully be thought as models of social reality as well as a model for social reality that serves the particular interests of the firm.
No marketing theory provides a general analysis of why institutional evolution took the path that it did and not another one. Marketing gurus know perfectly well, or have the intuition, that the future is not a state to be foreseen but a state to be created. It’s a prospective state, one of the many possible states. Therefore they know that they can, and have to, contribute to the realization of what they consider the desired state. How can they contribute? By providing a vision of future sufficiently optimist to be desirable and sufficiently credible to mobilize people in order that they take actions which will promote such a future state. That’s why, on the one hand it has to be shown that the gradual adoption of marketing is the result of the economic system’s historic trend toward the market economy, so that it is taken for granted. On the other hand, it has also to be shown that this situation must be “made to exist”. The acknowledgement of eras in Keith’s fashion is not a work of historiography, it is the rhetoric of a project. A prophecy which, like any prophecy, is made to have an effect on the future.

Marketing literature is replete with such rhetorical operations. Gurus know that their speech is intended to have effects on the future in providing a vision. Such a project suggests a desirable future and tries to engage present action in reaction/anticipation to this desired state. Moreover, the past is “open” to interpretation, while the future, as the cause of present action, is “fixed”. Past is open to the extent that it is rewritten according to the new prescription –i.e. the error of the past versus the new and “real” marketing to be adopted. Therefore the number and content of previous eras are incessantly changing. For instance, if we follow the most recent attempt of denunciation we have noticed in Sheth et al (2000), market orientation and “demand management” must be denounced in favour of “customer-centric marketing”. Thus, most of the time, the “fixed point” of marketing theory is the prophecy of a brighter future. A good marketing prophet is an expert in the art of make-believe.

**Consumer or citizen**

Marketing doctrine conceptualize the whole economy as a system of markets and within firms marketer try to get everyone to practice marketing. Everything, everywhere can be seen as a “product” (goods, services, ideas, money, jobs, education…) and any individual can be seen as a consumer/customer (patient, student, art lover, donor, employee, citizen…). All social actors are to be transformed into consumers (Kotler and Levy, 1969). Marketing provides a useful set of concepts for guiding all organizations worldwide. Social regulation through marketing and the market is desirable because every organization performs “marketing-like” activities whether or not they are recognized as such. No
organization can avoid marketing and this recognition ties marketing economic activity to a higher social purpose.

To face up to the taken-for-grantedness of marketing ideology is thus to face up the constant striving to acknowledge the cost/advantage calculation from the consumer’s viewpoint. How can we depart from this short-term maximizing rationality? Or, more exactly, how can critics as well as marketers understand that people are able to shift from mindset to mindset according to situation? How can action move between one based on a personal and self interested frame of action and one based on social values—i.e. regarding other people sentiments? We have to accept that people shift among multiple logics of action and justifications for each of several domains of social life: economy and market, family and home, polity and citizenship… Thus, we can look at the chronic tension which exists between the idea of the consumer and that of the citizen (Lang and Gabriel, 1995). Consumers are free, able to choose, allowed to express their individuality whereas the idea of citizen implies mutuality and control as well as a balance of rights and duties. Citizens are at once listened to, but also prepared to defer to the will of the majority. In as much as they can make choices, citizens have a sense of superior responsibility. The consumer on the other hand, is self-interested and the marketer provides products and advertising to incite the individual to govern himself according to fundamental hedonism for which pleasure, happiness and well-being are synonymous. Marketing doctrine seeks to incorporate the citizen into its image of the consumer by using the concept of votes and ballots: the consumer votes in the market place in the same way as citizens are voting. In this way of marketing legitimation, the more wealth of purchasing power the consumer has, the more votes s/he gets. According to this view, it is up to citizens as consumers to decide whether they want a service from the state and what quality they are prepared to pay for. On the other hand consumer activists are promoting the notion of citizenship in contradiction to the notion of the consumer. They seek to enlarge the consumer into someone who is responsible and socially aware. Marketing gurus have redefined the citizen as a purchaser while consumer activists stretch the idea of consumer in the direction of the citizen.

When transforming a citizen into a consumer, marketing ideology is legitimizing marketing action in the civic space. It’s extending beyond the legitimate order of the market to introduce its representations and justifications in a different legitimate order: the civic one. In other words marketing ideology is producing legitimation for its own justificatory regime in an attempt to anchor any social order in its own single common higher principle. What kind of people is this process producing? In 1830, Tocqueville (1850 [1947-311]) saw the value of self-interested action among American citizens, but he saw as well that it led to an isolating
individualism, to the citizen who “to sever himself from the mass of his fellow and to draw apart from his family and friends […] leaves society at large to itself”. Marketing ideology helped in shaping the contour and divisions of consumer culture accentuating what divided people and undermining common concerns (Cohen, 2003). Does, the distinction between consumers and citizens remain acute? Yes if there is some room for criticism. Is it possible to reverse a century-long of entwined citizenship and consumership? This remains a question or, at best, a conviction.

**Conclusion: the place of criticism**

Marketing practitioners as well as any social actor are placed in a ambiguous and uncertain world. They might not know that certain courses of action are more efficient than others. They may not even know the potential of their own power. This ambiguity allows for the influence of rhetorically savvy consultants or academics as well as the dissenting voice of criticism which must face the same pervasive lesson of rhetoric from Levitt (1975) in a retrospective commentary of its most cited article: “Marketing Myopia was not intended as analysis or even prescription; it was intended as a manifesto. It did not pretend to take a balanced position. Nor was it a new idea. […] I knew that the colourful and lightly documented affirmation works better than the tortuously reasoned explanation. […] An idea is not responsible for who believes in it.”

What are the lessons of this rhetoric? 1) whatever the audience (consumers, students employees or top managers), and whatever is for sale (good, service, idea, job, management tool) few people can stand much equivocation or ambiguity. Therefore avoid complex presentations weighing the pros and cons. Colourful and lightly documented ready-to-think affirmations work better than tortuously reasoned explanations, 2) the gurus’ discourse is a matter of ideas and people in the audience bear the responsibility for their belief in this ideology.

The role of criticism is to doubt the effectiveness of the production of legitimization by marketing ideology. Skills are essential to reveal the abilities mobilized by gurus’ texts in using metaphor and rhetoric to provide a literature that talk of an enchanting world which no one has ever really encountered. The critical process is a never ending one, that’s why it has to be continued. And one of its target remains the production of legitimization by marketing gurus that, according to Kotler, “crystallized in the mid-1950s” and are taken-for-granted in the first chapter of most marketing textbooks.
References