

Pomo-hypo: fashion marketing at two extremes

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Abstract

Modern marketing is in a crisis. Consumers are not as predictable as they used to be, partly because they are now more educated and recognise many of the marketing tricks. Particularly in industries where emotionality and symbolism are of paramount importance to define a strategic advantage like the fashion sector, traditional marketing tools aimed at organizing inbound (market research) and outbound (communication) information are increasingly showing their limitations. Both marketing scholars and practitioners are questioning traditional marketing techniques. Some offer solutions based on extremely sophisticated and refined methods that assume the possibility of control of the brand and knowledge of end-user needs. Others are advocating new, more intuition-based market research and 'stealth' marketing approaches to reach consumers. Others still try to establish a real conversations with these consumers or even give them the lead. In this paper we first give an overview of the main critiques and answers to these in marketing. Secondly we connect these answers, which go in totally different directions to the concepts of hyper- and postmodernism. Hypermodern marketing responds by 'trying harder': trying to measure ever more consumer variables in order to be able to 'microtarget'. Postmodern marketing recognises the new reality of more self-conscious consumers and tries to establish a constructive relationship with them. Then the variety of new marketing approaches is presented, while it is being shown in what way they link to postmodern or hypermodern endeavours. Finally, we argue that both approaches retain value if applied to different goals (e.g. in relation to different types of market information) and in different strategic contexts.

Keywords:
marketing,
postmodernism,
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identity

Modern marketing in crisis

In his typical straightforward style Peter Drucker once wrote (1954, p. 3) that marketing “is the whole business [of a firm] seen from the point of view of its final result, that is, from the customer’s point of view.” In a similar vein Philip Kotler (1999, p. 121) defines marketing as “the science and art of finding, keeping and growing profitable customers” and a marketing opportunity (1999, p. 36) as an “area of buyer need and interest in which there is a high probability that a company can perform profitably by satisfying that need.”

Understanding consumers and their needs and interests has, however, become quite difficult. For some time already, marketing professionals complain that consumers are getting fickle, unpredictable, and as a consequence difficult to satisfy or to hold on to even when satisfied. It is obvious that consumers need to be blamed for this mismatch between supply and demand, as managers and consultants do their utmost to diligently and faithfully apply the highly praised models learned from their marketing bestsellers.

One of the more heterodox marketing books (Wouters 2005) shortly summarises the main problems of market research:

- People don’t say what they think
- People don’t do what they say
- There is a difference between what people say and what interviewers register
- People are not able to think about or evaluate new things
- Theories precede facts
- Market research only measures the past

Peter Leeflang, a more traditional marketing professor recognises most of these problems and quotes an English study amongst non-marketing professionals who mainly see their marketing colleagues as “unaccountable, unreliable, expensive and slippery” (2005a, pp. 74-75). He enumerates not less than ten hypotheses which possibly explain this decreasing legitimacy of marketing professionals (Leeflang 2005a, pp. 75-78):

- Marketers do not measure the results of their plans. They just propose always newer plans

- Marketers do not calculate. They have no idea of 'marketing productivity'
- Marketers are unassailable. It's never marketing's fault
- Marketers do not keep their promises
- Marketers are badly educated. Many people in marketing have another background and do not know very much about marketing science
- The recession has led to the curtailing of marketing expenses
- The increasing importance of intermediate links in the chain leads to the increasing importance of the sales function
- Marketing people run too much after the latest marketing fads (like e-mail marketing, loyalty, CRM) and spend too much attention on issues like customer satisfaction [!]
- In principle everybody in the organisation has to think about marketing, so that as a consequence nobody does it professionally
- Many markets have become fragmented and difficult to oversee

Only with his last hypothesis does Leeftang come close to Wouters's remarks. Leeftang's main comment is that mainstream marketing is not professional and sophisticated enough. As a consequence his main advice and solution is: try harder, and measure more precisely (Leeftang 2005a & 2005b). Not surprisingly, in his turn Wouters (2005) sees such attempts as totally superfluous and futile. His way out of the marketing crisis goes into the direction of establishing unique value for very precise customer groups. Especially at the moment a certain need is most urgent for customers, they should make the mental association with the firm's offering and related values.

These two reflexive marketing professionals can be seen as representatives of two opposite directions out of the marketing crisis, which can be labelled hypermodern (Leeftang) or postmodern (Wouters).

- Hypermodern: more sophisticated and updated models have to be developed to better understand (and control) actual unreliable consumers. And non-marketing professionals should keep out of the marketing kitchen.

- Postmodern: the way to deal with consumers so far has not been effective, and as a consequence the basic premises of practicing and theorizing in marketing must be reviewed.

Before we look at how these developments work out in practice, let us clarify the concepts of modernism, post- and hypermodernism a bit more.

Modernism, postmodernism, hypermodernism

Modernism can be seen as the reference for mainstream marketing, the good old time in which everything seemed predictable, orderly and controllable. Modernism is, of course, a term with quite a few meanings and connotations. For some centuries already modernity has been the term used for everything new compared with existing traditions. So, a peculiarity of the actual discussion is that modernity is now – at least partly – seen as something of the past, so that we can talk about postmodernism (from the Latin post = after).

Possibly in the field of the arts, architecture and urban planning modernism has its most precise meaning and is basically associated with the period between 1920 and 1960:

“It was a term that covered a range of movements and styles in different countries, especially those flourishing in key cities in Germany and Holland, as well as in Moscow, Paris, Prague, and later, New York. All of these sites were stages for an espousal of the new and, often, an equally vociferous rejection of history and tradition; a utopian desire to create a better world, to reinvent the world from scratch; an almost messianic belief in the power and potential of the machine and industrial technology; a rejection of applied ornament and decoration; an embrace of abstraction; and a belief in the unity of all the arts – that is, an acceptance that traditional hierarchies that separated the practices of art and design, as well as those that detached the arts from life, were unsuitable for a new era. All of these principles were frequently combined with social and political beliefs (largely left-leaning) which held that design could, and should transform society” (Wilk, 2006: 14).

Optimism regarding the possibility of shaping, designing, moulding or modelling societies went, however, hand in hand with a traditional kind of elitism and paternalism. Mass parties and movements gave people their basic identity, which as a rule was not questioned. Even in democratic mass parties and movements there was a clear division of labour between leaders and those to be led (Van Schendelen, 1984).

In the realm of the economy, modernism was the time of the supply-side. As there still was a relative scarcity of goods, innovations were still sold relatively easily. In fashion, finally, modernism was the time of the fashion diktat with Paris as its undisputed capital. From New York to Moscow, the fashion magazines reported what happened in Paris and translated this to their local audiences. In their turn consumers were prepared to follow these fashions diktats, proposed to them by the main fashion designers, in a relatively docile way (McDowell 2000: 12-30).

From the 1960s onward this modernist illusion was increasingly shattered. Ever larger groups broke away from their social and ideological backgrounds. As a consequence, in their different economic and political roles of consumers and voters, people became more volatile and unpredictable. Increasingly people were no more prepared to be led. Moreover, critical studies made them aware of attempts at manipulation in the field of marketing and advertising. People also learned that it was possible to withstand top-down decisions through forms of social action and civil disobedience.

Finally, with the rise of the consumer society there was a shift in the economy from the supply to the demand side. With increasing supply, people were able to make choices. Moreover increasing information about global developments led them to question the social and ecological impact of economic growth and internationalisation. As a consequence modernity is no more seen by definition as progress. At the same time, the negative aspects of well-meant modernist utopian designs (from communist experiments to renewal plans in the realm of urban planning) became more clearly visible. 'Postmodernism' ('pomo' for the friends) – with its declaration of the end of all Great Stories – can be seen as the philosophical translation of this end of modernist illusions.

Modernist ideas, are however, not dead. In the field of management, 'cock-pit approaches' (Jacobs, 2005) in which managers do all the thinking, planning and design of the organisation, while other people are mainly seen as possible sources of resistance, are still quite popular. Many marketers recognise the difficulties of controlling and predicting consumer behaviour, but only see this as a necessity for pursuing the ideal of controllability and predictability even more with the help of 'hypermodern', supersophisticated models, for instance based on data mining, RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) chips and increasingly

differentiated socio-cultural and economic segmentations of consumer groups ('micro-targeting'). It remains true that measuring all and everything is not entirely futile. Sometimes it leads to some useful data on the basis of which decisions on production levels and changes in style and colour can be made with acceptable failure rates (Leeflang 2005b).

Fashion and the paradox of modernism: the quest for identity

Fashion is at the core of this paradox of modernism. In Gilles Lipovetsky's (2004) view, fashion has become the realm of creativity *par excellence*, taking over the role of 'perpetual revolution' from high art. But it is also part of a hypermodern economic system in which the connection between socially acceptable identities and value propositions of fashion firms has to lead to (hopefully) increasingly profitable business models. So we live in times which at the same time are post- and hypermodern.

Moreover, people have increasingly been liberated from their traditional bonds, but the consequence is often a high level of insecurity. Just as individuality and the need for social belonging are sides of the same coin, increasingly we have to liberate ourselves, to prove our original identity in order to be accepted socially!

Zygmunt Bauman has illustrated to what extent this 'liquid modernity' under the ethos of hedonism leads to an anxious quest of proving acceptable 'authentic' and original identities – which never become more than 'necessary optical illusions'. Fashion and shopping around provide material tools for this, as well as quite useful metaphors:

"Given the intrinsic volatility and unfixity of all or most identities, it is the ability to 'shop around' in the supermarket of identities, the degree of genuine or putative consumer freedom to select one's identity and to hold to it as long as desired, that becomes the royal road to the fulfilment of identity fantasies"

(Bauman, 2000, pp. 82-83).

In this quest for identity, people sometimes find inspiration in virtual communities. With this latter word, now especially communities on the internet come to mind. But the first virtual communities probably were those inspired by a similar style. In this respect Michel Maffesoli (1996) coined the concept of neo-tribes. With this he reacted to previous conceptualisations in terms of subcultures, which sometimes had too

much a more realistic connotation. In the 1970s, especially the CCCS (the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies in Birmingham) approach looked for working class youth cultures as really existing tight, coherent social groups. Later on, it appeared, however, that quite a few of these subcultures were relatively coherent constructions of the CCCS researchers and/or the media, rather than really existing groupings with such a degree of coherence. There was much more diversity in behaviour than was recognised. Some kinds of behaviour were filtered out, others were specifically highlighted (Bennett, 1999, pp. 603-605).

In our opinion, the term 'subculture' does not necessarily have this overstretched or idealised meaning. It can be used to classify similar value preferences of people who do not necessarily form a group. But of course, sometimes they do. They may adorn themselves with identification tags like socialist, punk, or (a certain form of) Christian or Muslim. With his concept of *tribus* or neo-tribes Maffesoli aims, however, to address higher levels of fluidity. "This bond is without the rigidity of forms of organization with which we are familiar; it refers more to a certain ambiance, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and 'form' (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 98). So we come back to Bauman's metaphor of the supermarket of identities in which individuals shop for the combination which fits their needs best. "*Tribus* are thus not 'tribes' in the traditional anthropological sense, for they do not have the fixity and longevity of tribes" (Shields, 1996, p. x). Moreover, the media play an important role in the constitution of these groupings, both in their origin as in prolonging their lifecycle (Stahl, 2003, pp. 31-32). This brings us back to marketing. As we will see in the next part of the paper, especially fashion marketing sometimes plays an important role in the co-development of neo-tribes and subcultures.

Marketing chaos: towards a taxonomy of marketing concepts

Following the definitions discussed earlier, we see marketing as a means to *mediate between the company's proposition and the market's acceptance of it*. There are however, different ways of thinking about this mediation. As one can see from Figure 1, we see a basic dichotomy of marketing approaches from hypermodern to postmodern, but with some variation. Some variants are more into the middle, but basically there is a kind of polarisation: does the firm try to be in control or not?

We also think that the hypermodern firms concentrate more on the level of products, and the postmodern more on the level of values. In the end, of course, all market transactions are based on a value connection between supply and demand (Jacobs 2007). But we think that the approaches on the right hand side of the figure are more aware of this. In the following five subsections we discuss these basic approaches, making a kind of inventory of their many manifestations.

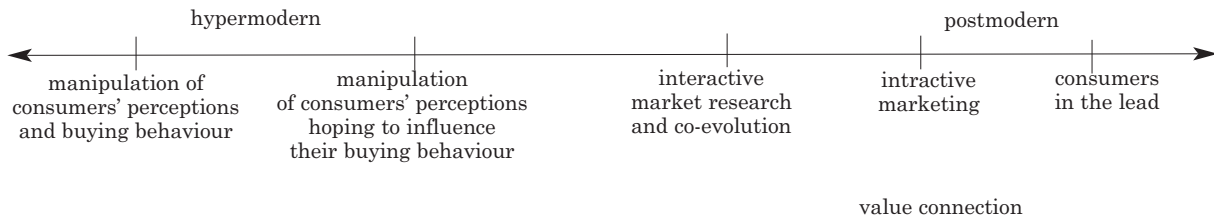


Figure 1. Marketing at extremes, including intermediate forms

Manipulation of consumers' perceptions and buying behaviour

In hypermodern approaches the consumer is merely considered as a receiver of a company's messages. The marketing effort will thus generate desired outcomes only given that a company can accurately assess and address consumers. For this it is necessary to chart these consumers as precisely as possible. On the basis of this, a unidirectional marketing effort can be designed. In Figure 2 we see therefore two arrows: one of market research, collecting 'hard facts' on consumer behaviour, the other the marketing effort itself.



Figure 2. Hypermodern marketing as a company-owned effort

Approaches which can be brought together in this first category are:

Datamining, microtargeting and contact optimisation

Datamining can be seen as extreme market research. Through all kinds of hypermodern methods coupled with extensive CRM databases target market profiles can be generated based on learning systems. The more data are processed in the most intelligent way the more accurate the

model of consumer segmentation becomes. This may then become the input for microtargeting. This latter term has been in the news recently since political parties, in the United States of America in particular, have been applying in-depth data analysis for targeting potential voters with quite specific messages in a very focused manner. In retail it is sometimes also used to introduce a system of differential pricing. In a similar way, contact optimisation combines customer, geographic, product and predictive data and, using sophisticated mathematical models, helps marketers to determine the optimal message to deliver to each customer. Contact optimisation is suited for high-volume direct marketing organisations that face the unenviable task of reconciling millions of combinations of customers, offers, and channels with customer analytics, business rules, and contact policies to deliver the optimal message to each customer.

Stealth, astroturf

Often this is also called 'below the radar' or undercover marketing; it is a compendium of tools that run counter to mass exposure. The message stays under the radar of the mass media; it cannot be identified by the traditional or mass 'detectors' but should be able to determine customers' perceptions, evaluations and buying behaviour. A modern form is 'astroturf' which organises fake activism or support for a brand or product, especially on the internet. It is, however, not without risks as nowadays quite a few people recognise such endeavours and publish them, so is a tactic which may backfire (Scoble & Israel 2006).

Permission marketing, personal casting

After Seth Godin's 1999 book, 'permission marketing' has gained momentum. Mostly in exchange of small rewards (e.g. air miles) customers give marketers access to information about their buying behaviour and even are prepared to change that behaviour. In exchange for a few air miles they alter for example their travel routes. Internet increases opportunities for what is called 'opt-in' mail; email messages that consumers ask for. The permission of consumers to contact them sets the first step in developing a mutual relationship. Personal casting is a variation on this theme. It is based on two principles: getting in personal contact with a customer through mobile messaging makes consumers feel special and as the relationship unfolds the user is being rewarded.

Nondemographic market segmentation

Nondemographic market segmentation traditionally has been looking more at buying behaviour than at demographic factors. This led to socio- or psychographic idealtypes like 'High Tech Harry' or 'Joe Six-Pack' trying to capture real people's lifestyles, attitudes, self-images and aspirations. As the predictive value of this approach has decreased over time, new ways of segmentation are now proposed based on the importance of a product or service to different kinds of consumer, in theory allowing firms to concentrate on those customers who will generate most profit (Yankelovich & Meer 2006).

TEASE

TEASE is an acronym devised by the heterodox marketing professor Stephen Brown (2003): Tantalize and torment customers, Employ exclusivity, Amplify a message, Sell secrets and mystery, Entertain. Here consumers are not manipulated in their buying behaviour through detailed information about them, but on the basis of some well-known psychological insights: the greater the exclusivity, the more consumers are seduced into buying... Brown, who has written books on postmodern marketing would possibly be surprised to find himself at this side of the dichotomy, but this approach is clearly of the one-sided, manipulative kind.

Manipulating consumers' perceptions, hoping to influence their buying behaviour

The second category we distinguish looks more like traditional push marketing and advertising. One pushes products to the market, which to some extent are related to well-known trends, but without too much market research or interaction. So, looking at Figure 2, the grey rectangle of market research is more or less neglected. In this category we list:

- *Traditional advertising.* From traditional media to banners and pop-ups on the internet.
- *Product placement in different media.* Companies try to get exposure by making sure their products are used in TV programs, or, more and more frequently, in video games. Companies actually produce or sponsor whole TV shows, magazines, or computer games to promote their products. This

was the origin of ‘soap operas’ when soap producer Procter and Gamble started this practice. This may actually go further than product placement when it allows companies to control the whole concept around the product. This may go into the direction of manipulative undercover or more interactive cause marketing.

- *Guerrilla marketing.* A cheap version of traditional advertising, as a concept originally coined by Jay Levinson in 1982.¹ It should help small less financially viable companies to attract attention to their products through focused and specific actions aimed at surprising customers, and creating a community of privileged people who know ‘what is behind the cryptic message’ or ‘where the next shop will open’. Like in guerrilla warfare, small focused actions should win of bigger planned attacks.
- *Endorsement by celebrities.* Getting attention and followers through the connection with popular people from the show business, sports or the media.
- *Online company generated videos.* Instead of creating stealth or stimulating unofficial movies to create a buzz, also companies generate videos they post online, through social networking sites, in the form of online advertising. If supported by banners this mass approach seems more effective than just banners or TV ads.²

Interactive market research and co-evolution

In this third form, there is actual interaction between the two parties – firms and consumers. They influence each other, but do not necessarily identify with each other. Basically they remain different parties. If we compare with the two previous basic approaches the mediation is more interactive, as can be seen from Figure 3. Moreover, both parties are aware that there should be some form of value connection between them.

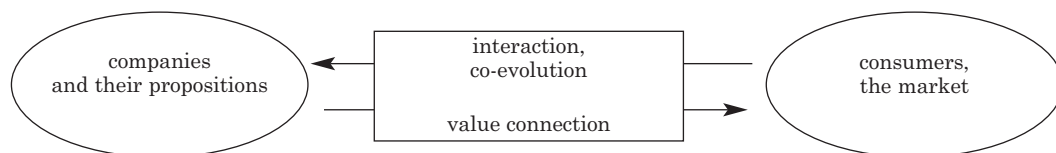


Figure 3. Marketing as interaction

Also here different forms can be recognised:

Coolhunting, infiltration, tribal marketing, grassroots marketing

Coolhunting is a form of action research. Especially consumer goods companies send out a kind of cultural detectives, mostly young people themselves, into 'cool territories', like the playgrounds in poor urban neighbourhoods, underground clubs or trendy bars to scout new trends. The race is to grab the newest, coolest culture the fastest, before it becomes mass culture, and integrate this in the own campaigns or even in product development. A more active version tries to turn the coolest people into advocates of the own brand, like Red Bull did by creating a school for DJ's. Then it becomes more like infiltration: infiltrating in the kind of group or tribe we discussed previously (therefore 'tribal marketing') by addressing the key 'selectors', opinion leaders or role models (in the latter case it becomes more like endorsement, see Manipulating consumers' perceptions, hoping to influence their buying behaviour). It may allow community members to develop a strong emotional connection with the brand. In this way it is also related to the term 'grassroots marketing'.

Mapping the co-evolving selection system

Buying is never an isolated decision. It is influenced by all kinds of preselection (e.g. by buyers of retail chains), influence (e.g. media, experts, critics, opinion leaders, peer group members) and selection. This is a complex co-evolving system, which nobody really controls, but which may be mapped in order to find the critical link, to try to influence these, but also to learn from them (Jacobs 2007).

Cause marketing

Here marketing messages are really based on a value connection by connecting to a good cause (the Third World, the environment, anti-racism and the like) which many people support. The brand 'Red' initiated by U2 singer Bono, is a good example of this.

Active streetmarketing

Actually a form of direct-personal marketing. It involves going on the streets to give away flyers or samples (also called 'tryvertising'), but with the aim of learning from reactions. This is a bit what also political parties do when they go on the streets to talk to people and hand out flyers before elections. This form of marketing is very old. It actually existed already before the advent of mass media, but companies as

political parties use it now to directly access a very specific group in their own context . In this way it also resembles the next form.

Ambient or place-based marketing

Ambient or place-based marketing involves placing ads on spots or products that are unusual like paper towels, drink holders or natural environments. The aim is to reach users in moments when they are willing to devote attention to the message. Red Bull for instance started by throwing empty cans of the drink in toilets of popular discos in larger cities.

Conversational marketing

This approach involves customers, but also other stakeholders, in a conversation based on 'low voice, listening and understanding', this instead of 'shouting, amplifying and shooting'. Internet-based social networks now allow companies to get involved in conversations with consumers achieving two aims: involving customers in the product conception and marketing process as well as gaining an image of caring and understanding. Adaptation, i.e. iterative actions adjusted by customer input is a much more viable strategy than thinking of and introducing a whole concept out of the blue (Levine et al. 2000; Wipperfurth 2005).

Interactive gaming

Games, whether online or not, have long been a prominent setting for companies to promote their products. Nowadays, however, companies are developing games to draw attention and create customer loyalty (e.g. giving away free products when players reach certain targets) or also trying to sell or getting consumer feedback through games. Second Life is maybe the most talked about online game that became an online world. Companies like Gap and Reebok have opened virtual stores, where consumers can customize their products and pay through virtual money that can be exchanged for real money. And Philips Design wants to get feedback through Second Life on some of its ideas for product innovations.

Interactive marketing

With the latter examples, it maybe seemed as if we had already entered this category of interactive marketing. In interactive marketing, we talk however not just about buying and feedback. Now customers become active players in the marketing itself. They react to the offering of the

firm, or maybe a kind of provocation which leads to a lot of interaction, especially among consumers themselves, as is illustrated in Figure 4.

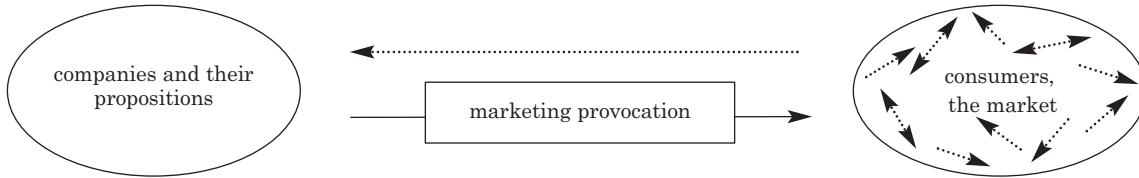


Figure 4. Interactive marketing

Viral or Buzz Marketing

Buzz and viral Marketing can be seen as the basic idea of this fourth approach, another idea promoted by Seth Godin with his book *Unleashing the Ideavirus* (2000). Viruses may spread diseases voraciously, and in the internet viruses can provoke huge damages very rapidly by their capability of spreading around at exponential rates. So, the idea of a virus is quite appealing to marketers. Basically the idea is that a company generated message is spread around by non-company actors. The spreading can happen in a serendipitous, or spontaneous, manner, or be driven by a company that creates a Buzz. So, the question is how to develop a concept that becomes a buzz, i.e. generates unique, spontaneous personal exchange of information (Godin 2003; Wipperfurth 2005). Gladwell (2000) relates it not only to the stickiness of the message, but also to the character of the people spreading the message.

Word of Mouth

Word of Mouth, the phenomenon that consumers talk about a product or a brand has been a major source of sales and thus revenue for long (Arndt 1967), but has received more attention recently. The Word of Mouth Marketing Association defines it as: The act of consumers providing information to other consumers. Or: Giving people a reason to talk about your products and services, and making it easier for that conversation to take place. Or: the art and science of building active, mutually beneficial consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-marketer communications. But immediately this leads to hypermodern attempts at control. Procter and Gamble for example has engaged 600.000 of the more socially active housewives to spread coupons and talk about products through its 'Vocalpoint' programme.³ But P&G tries to do it in

a not very transparent way). To be clear: the Word of Mouth Marketing Association does not agree with such kind of approaches.⁴

Word of Mouse

Word of Mouth through the internet. Some companies create a gadget, like an easy game, that can be picked up by consumers as well as an incentive for consumers to forward it to others. An example of more spontaneous world of mouse is that of the publication of 'unofficial' short videos generated by a company that are being spread for their shocking content (e.g. Ford KA, Volkswagen Polo).

Consumers in the lead.

In the final approach, the firm hands over control to the consumers. This does not mean, however, that the firm does not have any responsibility anymore.

- *Consumer Generated Content, Co-creation.* The content here may refer to media content (advertisings, videos) but also to the product itself. The idea is that consumers feel involved in the marketing of a product, by generating for example videos that advocate a brand's message – not necessarily the message or values the firm itself tries to convey. Firms may actually adopt some of these messages and even reward the selected (see also crowdsourcing). Co-creation goes one step further, involving consumers in the creation of the product. With the help of new digital design tools, increasingly it is possible for consumers to design their own products and to outsource these to manufacturing firms. These latter may in turn adopt some of these designs and reward their creators (Von Hippel, 2005).
- *Crowdsourcing:* increasingly firms outsource questions and problems to anyone who want to contribute, through the internet.

The list we have presented here certainly does not cover the multitude of marketing concepts circulating nowadays, but hopefully illustrates the degree to which the marketing landscape has become fragmented. Moreover, concepts have been formulated on different abstraction levels. Further exploration and classification of 'new marketing concepts' is needed, but so far we feel we can draw a number of tentative conclusions.

Concluding

As Lipovetsky has remarked we live in times which at the same time are post- and hypermodern. We have illustrated to what extent marketing is part of this paradoxal reality. It might seem that we have a clear preference in the discussion. For hypermodern approaches we have used terms like manipulation and control, for postmodern ones we talked about conversation, co-evolution and co-creation. With these terms we tried, however, to capture as precisely as possible these approaches. We certainly do understand the level of control large firms, for example in the fashion world, aim at. And notwithstanding the marketing crisis many people talk about, quite some of these approaches are relatively successful. But at the same time it is true that many attempts at control or even manipulation fail if not backfire. That's the reason why many other firms aim at a different kind of 'conversational' or 'co-evolving' relation with their customers. Instead of marketing concrete products or brands, they aim more at the level of shared values. In our research programme at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute we are trying to understand more precisely how such relationships actually work. A classic 'hypermodern' comment on postmodern approaches is that they remain quite vague and are in danger of repeating problems related to the now largely discredited qualitative socio- or psychographic segmentation methods.

Moreover, also postmodern marketers will be confronted with the fact that many consumers remain suspicious or at least do not really want to get involved with marketing endeavours whatsoever. So, a question is to what extent conversation and co-creation only makes sense in very specific markets.

Finally, looking at the basic dichotomy we have presented we are tempted to hypothesise hypermodern approaches are more typical for larger firms which administer the traffic of millions of goods, while the postmodern ones are more typical for startups and smaller firms. So an additional question to be answered in our research programme is: to what extent can bigger, established firms and brands structurally implement new, postmodern marketing concepts and techniques?

Notes

¹ See www.gmarketing.com

² See <http://www.marketing-online.nl/nieuws/ModuleItem47886.html>

³ BusinessWeek, May 2006:

http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_22/b3986060.htm

⁴ <http://www.womma.com/ethics/>

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