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**WHAT IS, OR SHOULD BE, THE PROPER
DOMAIN OF MARKETING THEORY?**

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The principal author of this paper, Sharon Purchase developed this paper from a preparatory Phd Project of which Dr Tony Ward was the Supervisor

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What is, or should be, the proper domain of marketing theory?

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Introduction

The title of this paper suggests that the domain of marketing theory can be determined strictly, accurately, and truly. Outhwaite (1993:33) says that 'the best possible explanations, however, are in no sense ultimate; there is no one true theory'. This statement can be applied to the domain of marketing theory, in that there is no true domain of marketing theory. No marketing domain is ever 'real' but exists in a relative degree of reality until a new theory or application of an existing theory is generated. Therefore, for this paper, the word proper will mean the colloquial sense of proper, and that is correct to a large degree.

The proper domain of marketing is an issue which is closely aligned with the debate on determining a general theory of marketing and has been written about increasingly since the 1960's (Bartels 1968; Kotler and Levy 1969; Kotler 1972; Bartels 1974; Bagozzi 1975; Hunt 1976; Bonoma, Bagozzi and Zaltman 1978; Day and Wensley 1983; Gronroos 1992). Sheth, Gardner and Garrett (1988:8), question the domain of marketing looking at two fronts:

First, we are unsure as to the correct external boundaries of marketing. Second, we are just now beginning to rekindle an old controversy regarding the homogeneity of the internal subdivisions within marketing.

Figure 1 illustrates how Sheth et al. (1988) separate the debate on the domain of marketing into two issues, external boundaries and internal homogeneity. This paper will follow the structure outlined by Sheth et al. (1988).

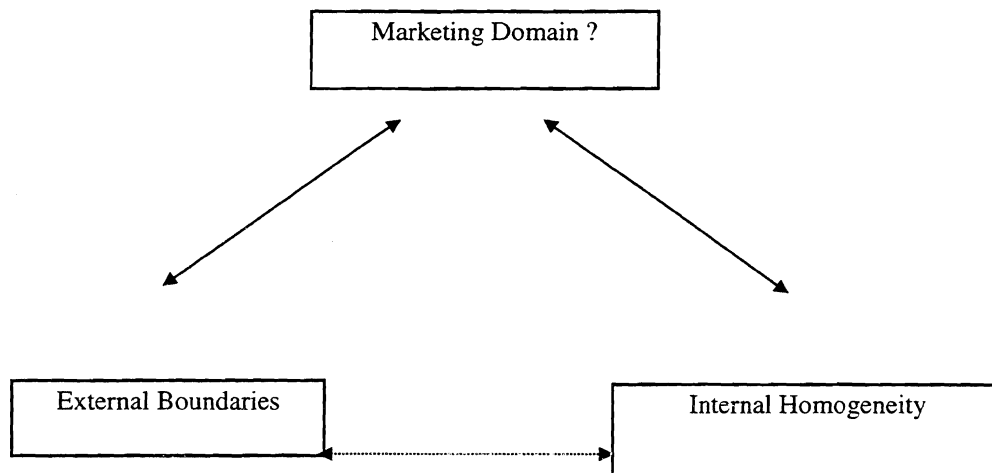


FIGURE 1: STRUCTURE OF DISCUSSION

Firstly, the paper will look at the development of an external boundary for the marketing domain. The development of an external boundary of the marketing domain will depend on a clear and precise definition of what is included within marketing. Although many definitions of marketing have been proposed in the literature, none has found enough consensus within both the academic community and practicing marketers to become widely accepted. Day and Wensley (1983:81) suggest that a marketing paradigm should be used to guide theory development and that such a paradigm does not yet exist:

In short, the generally accepted paradigm for marketing are simplistic and incomplete in their consideration of major elements of both practice and discipline of marketing. However, the growing recognition of these short comings provides the groundwork for an integrative paradigm that can effectively guide future theory development.

They also contend that current theoretical marketing paradigms are not satisfactory in their present state, as they are not 'rich' enough to fully describe the domain of marketing. Therefore it is not possible to guide the development of marketing theory within a fully integrated marketing paradigm, when no such paradigm exists. The quotation above still applies today, 13 years later.

Secondly, the paper will discuss the issue of internal homogeneity. Internal homogeneity raises issues such as

“Are domestic marketing and international marketing similar or dissimilar?”... “What, if any, are the differences among consumer marketing, industrial marketing, and services marketing?” (Sheth et al. 1988:8, 10)

Reaching a majority understanding on internal homogeneity is important for future theorists, as they need to determine whether their theories apply across the whole domain of marketing or whether they only apply in certain sub-disciplines. Development of theory across a wide number of sub-disciplines is necessary, if marketing is to develop the elemental tools or building blocks for reaching a general consensus of marketing and therefore developing the proper domain of marketing. A diagrammatic illustration has been developed which helps highlight the issue of internal homogeneity and how theory generation within the marketing domain might develop in time to generate a general consensus on what is marketing.

Definitions

Within the context of this paper the following definitions apply.

Domain - the scope or sphere of any branch of human knowledge (Webster's Dictionary 1990)

External boundaries of marketing - Boundaries which encapsulate the domain of marketing.

Internal boundaries of marketing - Boundaries which encapsulate the domain of an internal subdivision of marketing.

Marketing Community - People who affect the marketing discipline, consisting of practitioners, academics, and professional bodies.

Theory - A systematically related set of statements, including some law-like generalisations, that is empirically testable. The purpose of theory is to increase scientific understanding through a systematised structure capable of both explaining and predicting phenomena. (Ruddner as quoted in Hunt, 1991:149)

Functional Definition - a definition that describes an action

Structural Definition - a definition that develops boundaries around a concept

External Boundary

Marketing has been evolving since its inception in the early 1900's, from the discipline of economics. Bartels (1974:73) describes the driving forces behind the evolutionary process:

Since its inception early in the 20th century, the concept of marketing has undergone many changes. The causes of these changes have been both conceptual and perceptual: conceptual through the introduction of new ideas as to what is marketing and what it ought to do; perceptual through envisionment of new realms in which the marketing process might be applied.

With theory development being a continual process, the causes of the changes occurring within the concept of marketing are unlikely to change. Although new ideas, realms and visions of marketing are still being generated in the 1990's, the number of writings and academic discussions on this subject has decreased. Although a general consensus on the subject of 'What is marketing?', has not been reached presently, the writer thinks that a general consensus is not unachievable.

It is important to understand the metamorphosis of the term marketing, in order to develop a picture of where we are today. Interpretation of the literature indicates that the development of a general definition of marketing has gone down two different paths. One path used a functional definition while the other path used a structural definition. The next section of this paper will discuss the two paths taken with the development of a marketing definition.

Functional Definitions

The term marketing originated in the early twentieth century from the broad discipline of economics, through the development of interest in the distribution of commodities. Beginning from such a structured discipline, the original concepts of marketing did not include social processes as part of the marketing function.

For example the American Marketing Association defined marketing as ‘the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and service from producer to consumer’. (as quoted in Hunt, 1976:17)

Bartels (1968:57), was one of the first writers to try and change the concept of marketing from a structured business definition and include the social aspects of the field. He examined marketing as a *process* which has two separate parts.

In general, marketing connotes a process of two-fold character: technical and social. As a technical process, marketing consists of the application of principles, rules or knowledge relating to non-human elements of marketing. As a social process, marketing is a complex of interactions among individuals acting in role positions in the various systems involved in the distribution of goods and services.

The above quotation is one of the early writings which discusses how marketing should take into account many of the functional aspects of the discipline and that marketing is a process or an action.

This idea was broadened further by Kotler and Levy (1969) to include non-business activities and describe marketing as ‘servicing human needs’. Kotler (1972) elaborates further to describe the core concept of marketing as the ‘transaction’ and that increasing the generality of a theories concepts is an important step in achieving progress in the science of the discipline. Bartels (1974:76) then took his concept one step further by writing that ‘marketing is but a species of the generic, broader behavioural activity’. Bartels (1974:75) emphasises marketing as an activity/function, when he questions whether marketing is the techniques being applied or the background theoretical framework of economics.

The question, then, is whether marketing is identified by the field of economics in which the marketing techniques have been developed and generally applied, or by the so-called marketing techniques, where ever they may be applied

Bagozzi (1975) developed the idea of marketing being a function even further by describing marketing as an exchange process. Gronroos (1992) has suggested that the relationship between a customer and the company should be the basis of a general marketing theory.

In this definition of marketing the *relationship* is the key issue, and relationships are considered a function for the purposes of this research. Table 1 summarises the main authors and their descriptions of marketing.

TABLE 1 **CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF FUNCTIONAL DEFINITIONS OF MARKETING**

Date	Author	Reference to Marketing
1968	Bartels (p. 57)	marketing connotes a process of two-fold character: technical and social
1969	Kotler (p. 15)	servicing human needs
1972	Kotler (p. 47)	marketing as a transaction
1974	Bartels (p. 75)	generic, broader behavioural activity' and 'marketing technique
1975	Bagozzi (p. 32)	exchange process
1992	Gronroos (p. 1)	relationship marketing

Source: Review of literature for this research

Use of Functional Definitions

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages in using a functional path for the development of a general definition of marketing. This next section outlines the major advantages and disadvantages with the use of a functional definition.

Advantages

- One advantage of using a functional definition, is that practitioners in the field will be able to apply marketing concepts and therefore easily relate to the definition. Marketing practitioners will then be able to apply their knowledge and skills in a very general manner to many different situations.

- Another advantage is that information flow between disciplines such as marketing, economics, and psychology would easily occur as no rigid limitations would be placed around the disciplines (Bartels, 1974).
- Concurrent with the information flow would also be the introduction of different testing techniques and theory development processes from other disciplines which could be applied within the marketing discipline (Bartels, 1974).

Disadvantages

Defining marketing as a process, has a number of disadvantages, which are given below:-

- The marketing domain would be very broad and would apply to every situation where the function was carried out. For example, if marketing was 'an exchange process', all exchanges between people, including asking a friend to join you for lunch would come under the definition of marketing. The marketing domain would become so large that academic research would be broadened but not necessarily deep and therefore there is less likelihood of practical solutions being found. (Bartels, 1974)
- Marketing has both a functional and a structural base and therefore a functional definition only takes into account one side of the marketing discipline.
- Educators will find it difficult to develop such broad courses and students may not gain satisfactory depth of knowledge during the course. (Bartels, 1974)

Structural Definitions

Four academics, Hunt (1976) and Sheth, Gardner and Garrett (1988) have tried to define marketing using a structural classification system. These academics developed classification systems which they used to try to explain the domain of marketing. Hunt (1976) developed the three dichotomies model, which attempted to place marketing into a structural framework and so describe the scope of marketing. This model classified marketing into eight cells using three categories:- positive/normative, profit/non-profit, and micro/macro. This model came under some scrutiny by fellow academics, which resulted in Hunt (1976) further elaborating on this model.

The elaborations made in this subsequent article would be classified as the 'transformation rules' which are required if the idea is to become a formal system, based on theory generation criteria developed by Hunt (1991:155). Hunt (1976:53) suggested that there are four criteria which would make the profit sector/non-profit sector dichotomy non-existent. The criteria are given in the following quotation:

I suggest that the profit sector/ non-profit sector dichotomy will be useful until such time as 1) "broadening the concept of marketing" ceases to be controversial, 2) nonprofit sector marketing is completely integrated into all marketing courses (and not treated as a separate subject with separate courses), 3) administrators of nonprofit organizations generally perceive their organizations as having marketing problems, and 4) these administrators hire marketing people and, where appropriate, set up marketing departments. At such a time the dichotomy will truly be excess baggage and of interest primarily to marketing historians.

The four conditions described above by Hunt have been met to a large degree, which has negated the profit sector/ non-profit sector dichotomy. For example it could be argued that non-profit marketing is included in standard introductory marketing subjects offered at Australian business schools. Practitioners within the non-profit sector do acknowledge the need to implement marketing principles and in the majority of cases have done so. Does this make the three dichotomies model a two dichotomies model?

It should be noted that in 1991, Hunt has still incorporated the profit sector/nonprofit sector dichotomy in his scope of marketing model, and we are therefore led to assume that he does not consider the four criteria specified above to have been fulfilled.

Could this model be used as a classification schemata for marketing? To answer this question the three dichotomies model would need to give affirmative answers to the questions raised by Hunt(1991:184), outlining the criteria for evaluating classification schemata. One of the criteria for a classification system is that all categories must be mutually exclusive.

The criteria for mutual exclusivity has raise the following issues:-

- *Is the profit sector / non-profit sector mutually exclusive?*
- *Is the positive / normative dichotomy mutually exclusive?*

Firstly, discussion on the mutual exclusivity of the profit and non-profit sector dichotomy. Non-profit organisations are required to generate positive cash flows if the organisation is to

- (1) increase services to stakeholders,
- (2) ensure long term survival through a positive cash flow and
- (3) generate funds to support new services which meet the needs of a changing customer base. This requirement to generate positive cash flows is the same requirement which categorises the profit sector. A positive cash flow is often equated to a profitable enterprise. For the dichotomy to exist it indicates that the non-profit sector would have to generate a negative cash flow. It would be unusual for a non-profit enterprise to survive in the long term if it generated a negative cash flow. The above argument questions whether the dichotomy even exists and whether the sectors are mutually exclusive.

Secondly, discussion on whether the positive / normative dichotomy is mutually exclusive is required. Hunt (1991:12) defines positive and normative as:

Positive marketing adopts the perspective of attempting to describe, explain, predict, and understand the marketing activities and phenomena that actually exist. This perspective examines what *is*. In contrast, *normative* marketing adopts the perspective of attempting to prescribe what marketing organisations and individuals ought to do or what kinds of marketing systems a society ought to have. That is, this perspective examines what *ought to be* and what organisations and individuals *ought to do*.

In some circumstances the situation would arise where the practitioner is *practicing what they ought to do*. That organisation could then be placed within both dichotomies. Hunt (1991: 151) also indicates, that theory and the real world should be closely combined or the theory under consideration is not a good theory. This is summed up in the following statement:

Two conclusions immediately follow: (1) All purportedly theoretical constructions must be related to the real world. (2) All purportedly theoretical constructions must be practical, since the explanation and predication of real-world phenomena must rank high on any list of practical concerns.

If the real world and theory are closely combined it would be difficult to delineate the theoretical boundary between positive and normative. Therefore should the positive / normative dichotomy exist and are they mutually exclusive? Good marketing theory would be placed within both dichotomies, thus negating the mutual exclusivity of the dichotomy.

Sheth et al. (1988), also developed a structural classification system, based on the twelve schools of thought. This classification system indicates the development of marketing thought, rather than become a classification system describing the domain of marketing. When evaluated against the criteria suggested by Hunt (1991:184), it can be shown that the system could not be considered a classification schemata.

The twelve schools of thought can not be called a classification schema for marketing as it does not conform to all the criteria for a classification schemata. The following points indicate deviations from the criteria:-

1. The twelve schools of thought do not specify the properties or characteristics of marketing.
2. All the schools are not mutually exclusive and theories could apply to more than one school. The partitioning of theory could be considered fuzzy.

3. Is the schema useful? This criteria is difficult to answer, without undertaking research to determine if the schema is being used by academics in their generation of marketing theory.

Use of Structural Definition

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages of using a structural classification system to define the general marketing domain. These are listed in the following section.

Advantages

- By developing a well defined structural classification system to define marketing, the marketing domain will be easily defined by theorists and general marketing practitioners.
- Bartels (1974) argues that once marketing develops a concise and clear understanding of what is encompassed by the term marketing then theory generation and marketing educators will have a clear path to follow in the future. He argues that theory generation within the marketing discipline will develop depth rather than breadth once a consensus is reached on what is to be included within the marketing domain.
- Once theory generation develops depth it will be more likely to achieve solutions which will aid practitioners (Bartels, 1974).

Disadvantages

Using a structural classification to generate a domain of marketing has a number of disadvantages which are listed below:

- Marketing has both a functional and theoretical base and it is difficult to separate the two.
- Marketing theory involves understanding human behaviour and perceptions, and that it is very difficult to place boundaries around human behaviour.
- Boundaries may restrict some aspects of the theory generation process, by limiting researchers areas. (Bartels, 1974)

Generating the Marketing Domain

Generating the domain of marketing is important if the discipline is to develop and gain a direction (Bartels, 1974). Hunt (1991:33) confirms such a statement when he says that “*All disciplines must have general paradigms. These paradigms represent a loose consensus among the participants in a discipline concerning its fundamental nature*”. Review of literature (Bartels 1968; Kotler and Levy 1969; Kotler 1972; Bartels 1974; Bagozzi 1975; Hunt 1976; Bonoma, Bagozzi and Zaltman 1978; Day and Wensley 1983; Gronroos 1992), indicates that the loose consensus of agreement to a general marketing paradigm has not yet been achieved.

From the argument raised previously, a general marketing paradigm should have a basic structural framework, within which the marketing function is contained. The basic structural framework would be the marketing domain. Could the marketing domain come from the existing structural frameworks discussed previously? Hunt (1991:33) suggests that:

The Three Dichotomies Model of Marketing would seem to be a general paradigm that could help resolve some of the critical problems in marketing. The paradigm is (1) properly inclusive, (2) analytically useful, (3) pedagogically sound, and (4) conceptually robust. The paradigm is inclusive and healing rather than exclusive and divisive.

Although Hunt put forward the idea that the three dichotomies model would be a sound structural framework, analysis (as outlined previously) indicates that this framework does have flaws. These flaws are significant enough to exclude the model as a general marketing paradigm as it currently exists. It does not therefore explain the marketing domain as it currently exists. Adapting the model to take into account some of the issues raised previously might undermine the basic principles of the model. As the principle assumption of the model is that the dichotomies exist, removing a dichotomy (for example profit sector / non-profit sector) would place the basic framework of the model into question.

The twelve schools of thought model proposed by Sheth and Gross (1988) and Sheth et al. (1988), also contains a number of problems which eliminate its use as a general paradigm for the marketing domain.

This model may be adapted if it could be shown that the schools of thought are mutually exclusive. This may involve for example eliminating one school which does not contribute significantly to the model. This raises issues such as *are the twelve schools or thought going to become the thirteen schools of thought* and is it possible to adapt the model to take into account new ideas which are likely to develop in the future.

Developing Internal Homogeneity

The second issue which effects the marketing domain is the issue of internal homogeneity. Sheth et al. (1988) raises three questions (given in the introduction) which indicate that there are a number of sub-disciplines within the marketing discipline which emphasise their differences rather than their similarities; domestic marketing / international marketing; industrial marketing / consumer marketing and goods marketing / services marketing. Internal homogeneity is an important issue when looking at defining the marketing domain. Theory generated within the marketing domain must be assessed as to whether it encompasses just a single marketing sub-discipline, relevant to all sub-disciplines or a number of sub-disciplines.

Environmental forces outside the control of people within the marketing discipline alter the perceptions of the issue of internal homogeneity which could alter the likely answers to the question raised by Sheth et al. (1988) in the long term.

Upl and Upah (1983:235), have already questioned the extent of the differences between service marketing and goods marketing. They are quoted as saying

...our view is that there are a small number of major differences between products and services. Furthermore, we would agree with Bonoma and Mills (1979), who suggest that differences between products and services and the resulting differences in marketing are "much more a matter of emphasis than nature or kind".

This quotation indicated that the differences between marketing's disciplines are often *not so much the basic theory but more the way it is applied*. This sentiment is reiterated by Onkvisit and Shaw (1991:15), when they indicated that:

Whether services marketing is different depends on one's perspective - not unlike stating that a glass is half full (or half empty). A man, of course, is physically different from a woman in many aspects. But this does not negate the fact that they are also quite similar in many ways. Should we then focus on the differences or similarities - or both?

The eight year difference in these writings, shows that marketing has not changed in their perceptions of the differences within internal marketing sub-disciplines. Such perceptions exist within both marketing academics and marketing practitioners.

Differences between domestic and international marketing raise the concept of globalisation. The concept of globalisation is such that domestic marketing and international marketing should no longer be *perceived* as being different by practitioners, as they are now operating within the single global economy. The fact that this issue is still in existence indicates that the concept of globalisation is not necessarily accepted by a number of academics and practitioners. Globalisation is a relatively new concept, raised by Levitt (1983), and its acceptance as a major force and concept within the marketing discipline which will change many current business practices is gradually increasing. Levitt pointed out that not only will business practices change but also business structures and perceptions of where they belong within the global environment will change. He said that 'The world's needs and desires have been irrevocable homogenised. This makes the multinational corporation obsolete and the global corporation absolute.' (Levitt 1983:93) This indicates that companies must undergo a directional change if they are to continue to compete in the global environment.

Building a Concept Map of Internal Homogeneity

To assist in developing an understanding of some of the internal issues, such as those mentioned above, a concept map has been developed which highlights peoples perceptions of internal homogeneity.

The concept map for internal homogeneity, shown in figure 1 indicates only a few of the internal sub-disciplines within the marketing discipline. Many more sub-disciplines could be added but it was considered that the figure would become too complex, without adding additional understanding.

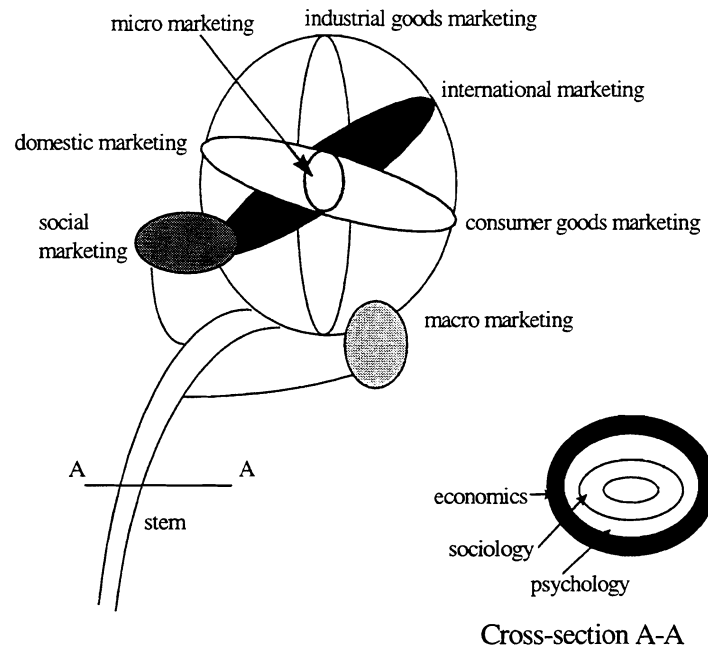


FIGURE 2 CONCEPT MAP OF INTERNAL HOMOGENEITY

The concept map for internal homogeneity is based on six major assumptions:-

1. That all internal sub-disciplines intersect at some point. An example of this point would be the exchange process or micro-marketing, which occurs within all marketing sub-disciplines.
2. That theory development has reached the external limits of the marketing domain in some places.
3. The area within each sub-discipline indicates the amount of theory generated. The larger the area, the greater the amount of theory generation. Those sub-disciplines with only a small area, indicate that only limited theory generation has taken place.

4. The internal disciplines as drawn at opposite ends of the elipsoid do not indicate direct contrasting theories but only differences between sub-disciplines theoretical development and application.
5. The 'budding' internal disciplines of macro-marketing and social marketing, although trying to enter the marketing domain (as indicated by the overlap) have not yet been fully integrated into the domain.
6. The stem indicates other related disciplines which feed the marketing domain, thus helping it to grow and become a 'full bloom'.

For simplicity, the rest of the discussion will concentrate on the evolution of the 'flower' and not indicate other sections, such as the stem and the buds.

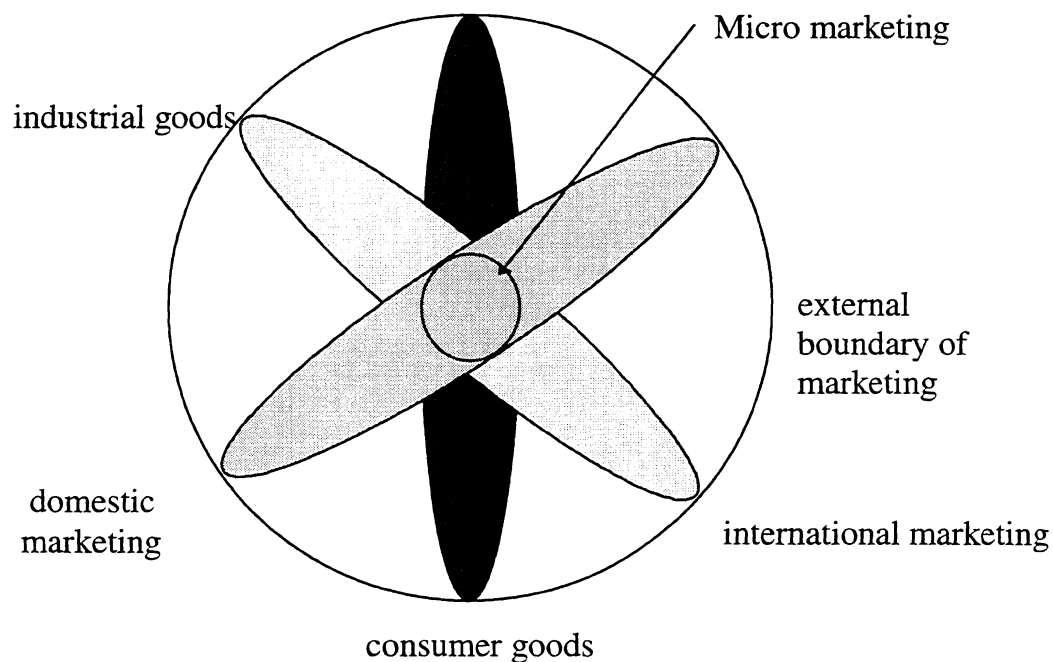


FIGURE 3: EVOLUTION OF THE 'FLOWER' - STAGE 1

The area of intersection, where the sub-disciplines overlap, is an area where theories apply to all sub-disciplines. As the amount of theory generation, theory verification and research increases, it is expected that the area of intersection will also increase, as shown in figures 4 and 5. As this area increases the area of differences between sub-disciplines continually decreases.

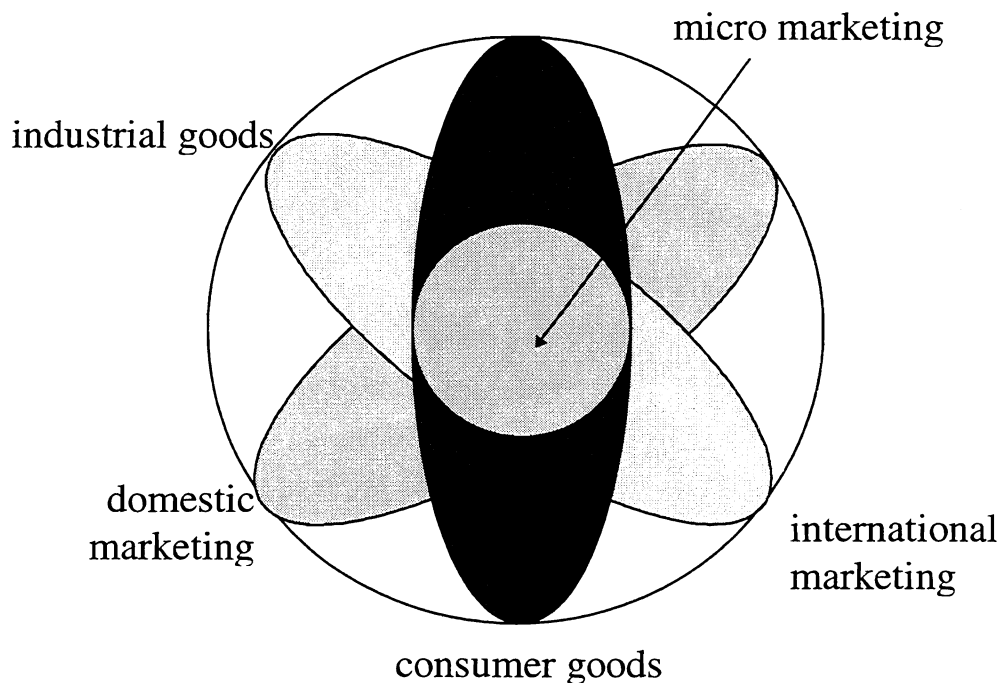


FIGURE 4: EVOLUTION OF THE 'FLOWER' - STAGE 2

As the volume of research generated by academics increases, a corresponding rise in theory generation could be reasonably expected. This rise in the amount of theory generated will accordingly increase the total area of each marketing sub-discipline. This is indicated in figure 4 and 5. It should be noted that the time period over which this may occur is not specified, and the rate of change is not necessarily constant or the same for all sub-disciplines. Also note that the shape does not develop into a circle as it is considered that there will always be minor differences between the sub-disciplines.

This concept map is used to convey perception of internal homogeneity and it could be argued that as individuals have different perceptions, each concept map will be different. Agreement will not necessarily be reached on the eventual relative amount of internal homogeneity which will eventually develop. The important point to note is that the area of theory generation which intersects with all sub-disciplines is increasing and that when this area becomes large enough people will visualise the marketing domain as a cohesive whole rather than separate fractional sections.

In the physical sciences the following fact is often used:- It is not possible to know the whole before knowing the sum of the parts. This logic applies to the marketing discipline, in that we must know the sum of the parts or the total of the internal sub-disciplines before developing the whole. In this paper the future sum of the parts is depicted as the proper marketing domain.

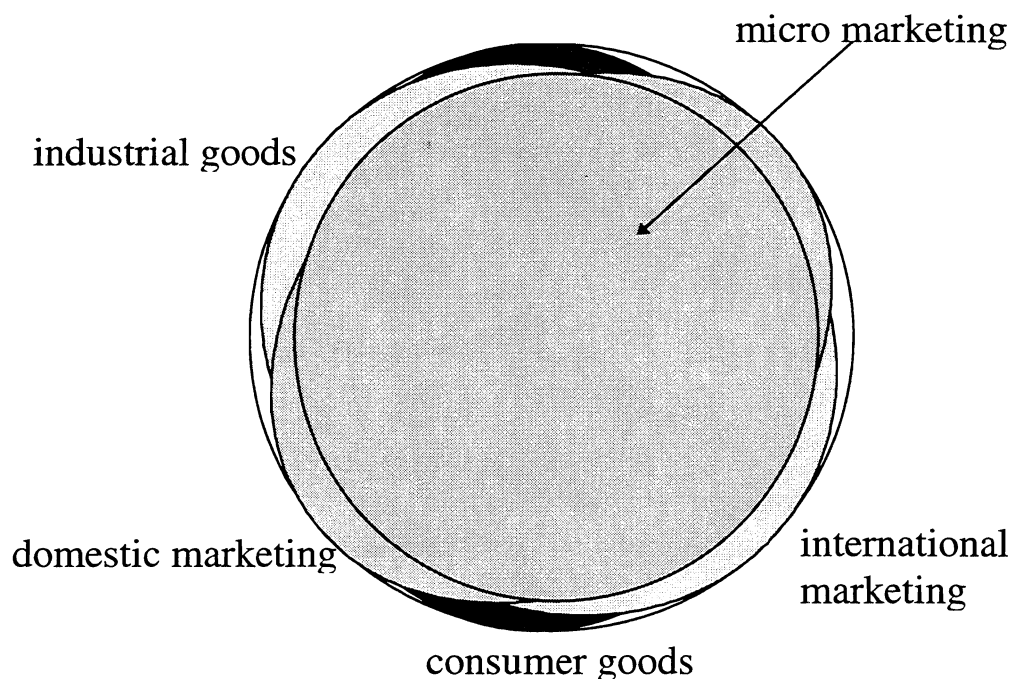


FIGURE 5: EVOLUTION OF THE 'FLOWER' - STAGE 3

Implications of Internal Homogeneity to the Marketing Domain

Internal homogeneity has two important implications when considering the marketing domain. Firstly, when academics are developing theory they should consider whether their theory can cross a number of marketing sub-disciplines or be relevant only to one sub-discipline. To assist in the understanding of the proper domain of marketing, theories should be generated which cross a number of marketing sub-disciplines therefore being inclusive rather than divisive. Secondly, marketing theorists and practitioners trying to develop a better understanding of the proper domain of marketing theory should consider the importance of the similarities between marketing sub-disciplines. The domain of marketing theory at the minimum must contain all marketing theory which crosses a number of sub-disciplines. From this minimum, the proper domain of marketing can be generated.

Conclusion

This paper did not fully answer the question asked in the title. It did go some way in raising the issues and offering the writers perspectives of how these issues are affecting the generation of a consensus on the proper marketing domain. One step towards reaching a consensus, is for agreement to be reached on what constitutes marketing. When looking at root linguistic theory, marketing - pertains to the domain of a market and/or marketplace. From this perspective the domain of marketing theory should be kept to actions of buy and selling in the market.

The writer's answer to the question would be that the domain of marketing should not be too broad, nor too narrow. It should be based on a structural framework, which encompasses the functional aspects of the discipline. It should not encroach on other disciplines domains, such as economics and sociology, but draw on theories, research procedures and results generated in these other disciplines when required. This is not to say that marketing students should not learn theories from other disciplines or that educators should not use other disciplines when compiling subject matter. The proper domain of marketing should include all marketing theory which crosses a number of marketing sub-disciplines. Such theories can be used as the building blocks for the domain of marketing.

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