

Negotiating Change in Marketing Systems: A Collection of Essays

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Abstract

The majority of marketing literature – both academic and practitioner oriented – tends to focus one of two key actors in marketplace: the consumer and the producer, with an emphasis the mutually beneficial creation of value as the two parties take part in exchanges and transactions. Although a fruitful endeavor, such a transaction-focused approach relegates to secondary status the plethora of other marketplace participants and members of society that affect and may be affected by the focal exchange. Yet an exchange between any two producers and consumers will not exist in a vacuum, but rather influence (and be influenced by) myriad social and institutional processes such as changing cultural, social, and regulatory norms and structures.

This dissertation, a collection of three essays, focuses precisely on these complex interrelationships, examining how market actors are influenced by, respond to, and shape the broader institutional and social context in which they are embedded. Using marketing systems as an enabling theory, the introductory chapter (PART I) outlines how markets are complex structures embedded in social and environmental contexts, shaping one another. Then, over three essays (PART II), the dissertation illustrates the dynamic nature of marketplaces. In marketing systems, change is seldom isolated and confined to a given part of the system, but rather has a ripple effect on other system participants and antecedents. Marketers, consumers, policymakers, and other system participants act and react to one another, each seeking to exert their influence on the marketing system with a particular goal or desired outcome in mind.

PART I: Overview of the Dissertation

Research Problem and Goals of the Research

“All micromarketing activities occur within and thus derive meaning from some larger marketing system” (Shultz 2007, p. 294).

For over half a century now, the buyer-seller dyad has been the trusted workhorse of marketing theory and practice. Most of marketing literature – both academic and practitioner oriented – has limited itself to studying dyadic, cooperative, mutually beneficial value-creating exchanges between the two parties (Mittelstaedt, Kilbourne, and Mittelstaedt 2006). Although a fruitful endeavor, such a transaction-focused approach excludes consideration of other parties and members of society that affect and may be affected by the focal exchange (Webster & Lusch 2013) For one, the resources used in value creation typically come, to a significant degree, from actors outside the firm-consumer dyad (Vargo & Lusch 2011, 2016). At the same time, the outcomes of an exchange between two actors will often also impact other parties outside of the immediate producer – consumer dyad. Finally, dyadic exchanges take place in marketplaces, which themselves do not exist in a vacuum, but are constantly being shaped and reshaped by social and institutional processes such as changing cultural, social, and regulatory norms and structures (see e.g., Giesler & Fischer, 2017).

The frequent tendency of mainstream marketing to disregard the broader context of dyadic exchanges has led to three prevalent biases in marketing literature (Giesler and Fischer 2017): the economic actor bias, the micro-level bias, and the variance bias. The economic actor bias in marketing scholarship refers to the tendency of researchers to focus almost

exclusively on the actions of and relationships between consumers and producers, excluding many other individual and institutional actors that may influence and be influenced by consumers and producers. Marketing literature's micro-level bias is the tendency of marketing literature to reduce macro-cultural, historical and market-level structures and forces to mere contextual variables. This has led to an abundance of literature on how consumers and firms act and think, while the impact of the so-called "context of context" (Askegaard and Linnet 2011) - the forces that shape this thinking and acting- remains under-researched. Finally, marketing's variance bias refers to the tendency of marketing scholarship to privilege questions dealing with variance in and covariation among dependent and independent marketing variables, rather than studying processes of change, development and decline over time (Langley et al., 2013).

The goal of my research is to address these biases in extant literature by examining how market actors are influenced by, respond to, and shape the broader institutional and social context in which they are situated. I take the view of markets as complex systems, drawing on the initial conceptualization first proposed by Alderson (1965), Cox (1965), and Fisk (1967), the subsequent work of scholars such as, Dixon (1984), Hunt (1981), Layton (2007), Lusch & Vargo (2006), Shultz (2007), and Wilkie & Moore (2007), and scholarship in the macromarketing tradition in general (Meade & Nason 1991; Mittelstaedt et al. 2006).

Adopting a systems perspective to marketing allows for considering the various interrelationships and networks between actors in a marketplace, their impact on (and the impact of) the economic, social, and cultural context in which these actors are embedded, as well as the economic, social, and environmental consequences of market actions (Mittelstaedt, et al., 2006).

Comprised of three essays, my dissertation addresses the general research question of *how do marketplace participants negotiate change in the marketing system and its antecedents?*

Given the scope of the question, each essay in the dissertation adopts a different perspective on the topic. Essay I takes as its focal point the firm, and illustrates the impact of change at the marketing-system level. Essay II examines how marketing system participants adapt to change at the level of marketplace antecedents – the economic, social, and cultural context in which the marketplace is situated. Conversely, Essay III looks at how marketing system participants seek to enact change in these marketplace antecedents.

The remainder of the overview will continue with a summary of key literature pertaining to the topic of marketing systems, before proceeding to an overview of the methods and data used in the Essays. The section then concludes with a summary of each essay, detailing the research problems addressed and the key contributions.

Review of Extant Literature

Marketing systems

Marketing systems are to be found everywhere – from primitive tribal societies to advanced western economies. They can take many forms, from simple barter within and between small groups, to the trading networks linking Asia and Western Europe over a millennium ago, to

the complex networks of small and large enterprise linked in the creation and delivery of the goods, services, experiences and ideas that underpin contemporary society. They range from a single act of exchange involving a seller and buyer, to complex interactions involving multiple sellers, many buyers, and an ever-widening range of traded objects. They include value chains and service systems, peasant markets and shopping malls, artisans and business eco-systems, networks for private gain and for social benefit.

(Layton 2011, .p. 260)

As the quote above illustrates, marketing systems can take many forms: from a microsystem consisting of two transaction partners, to an aggregate marketing system that spans an entire sector in a country (Layton 2007) At the core of each system, however, is an act of voluntary economic exchange of a single or multiple goods, services, experiences, and ideas. Over time, as individuals notice opportunities for profit through specialization, simple exchanges may grow into large systems comprising multiple specialized actors. Eventually, markets may form, with more people becoming involved in the value creation process, developing trade networks, linking communities, and introducing cultural change and diversity (Layton 2011).

Layton (2007, p. 230) defines marketing systems as networks of “individuals, groups, and/or entities linked directly or indirectly through sequential or shared participation in economic exchange that creates, assembles, transforms, and makes available assortments of products, both tangible and intangible, provided in response to customer demand.” Described in terms of their structural and functional elements, marketing systems can be said to comprise exchange logics (Layton 2007; Vargo & Lusch 2011), marketing flows (Klein and Nason 2000; Layton 2007), networks of resources and resource-providing actors (Arndt 1986, Klein

and Nason 2000; Layton 2007; Vargo & Lusch 2011), the assortments created and delivered (Klein and Nason 2000; Layton 2007), and the many customer groups (intermediate and final) whose needs are served by the operation of the marketing system (Layton 2007; Vargo & Lusch 2011).

The primary purpose of a marketing system is to improve human welfare by delivering to customers a broad assortment of goods, services, experiences, and ideas, satisfying a broad variety of human needs (Alderson 1957). Because consumer demand is heterogeneous, human welfare is improved by systems that expand the assortment of goods and services available to match the broad gamut of customer needs and wants. Exchange networks represent relationships among specialist actors who each believe they can benefit from participating in a marketing system, leading to flows of ownership, possession, finances, risk, and information between the various actors involved in the system (Fisk 1967).

As with nearly all systems theories (Skyttner 2005), three basic postulates can be said to apply to marketing systems (Mittelstaedt et al. 2006): (1) the behavior of each system participant has an impact on the behavior of the whole system, (2) the behavior of system participants and their effects on the system are interdependent, and (3) the behavior of any subgroup of participants will impact the behavior of the entire system, and will in turn be impacted by the system as well. In addition, according to Mittelstaedt et al. (2006), two further insights from systems theory are central in distinguishing marketing systems scholarship from the consumer-producer focus of micromarketing: (4) the differences in the success or failure of marketing systems depend on the initial conditions of markets – the marketplace antecedents, and (5) all actions of market participants (firms, channels,

institutions, and consumers) will have unintended consequences that must be accounted for when judging the success or failure of a marketing system (Klein 1977).

Change in Marketing Systems

Antecedents and Outcomes

Marketing systems theory illustrates the interconnected nature of all marketplace actors. The behavior of each actor or group of actors will have an impact on the behavior of the entire system. Marketplaces, in turn, are shaped by the environmental context from which they emerge, as well as the outcomes and often-unintended consequences of marketplace participants, which may in turn impact the environmental context, creating feedback loop.

The socio-economic context from which a given marketing system emerges will have a profound impact on its structure and dynamics. Differences across economic, social, and cultural contexts - what Mittelstaedt et al. (2006) call the formal, informal, and philosophical antecedents of a marketplace – will shape the structure of markets and marketing systems, affecting the organizing principles of marketing, the relationships within exchange networks, and, ultimately, the assortments offered to consumers.

As defined by (Mittelstaedt et al. 2006, p. 135) *formal antecedents* are the “legal and regulatory structures of nations or markets”. Formal antecedents such as public policy (Harris and Carman 1983), taxation (Mittelstaedt and Stassen 1991), and laws and regulations (Redmond 2009) can have a significant impact on the marketplace structure. *Informal antecedents* are codified in the “cultural, ethnic, and religious factors that shape market systems”. These include ethnic communities (Speece 1990), religious beliefs and organizations, (Mittelstaedt 2002), as well as consumption culture (Goldman, Krider, and

Ramaswami 1999) Finally, *Philosophical antecedents* refer to the “factors that shape perceptions of the role of markets and marketing systems in people’s lives, directly or indirectly”.

Marketing transactions can produce negative or positive outcomes both for transaction participants as well as third parties not immediately involved in the system. Because marketing systems are embedded in a social environment, over time, the system’s outcomes can influence a society’s norms, values, and rules (Dixon 1984). In other words, while the antecedents shape the marketing system, the outcomes of a marketing system can in turn act as inputs back into the formal, informal, and philosophical antecedents. Figure 1, taken from Mittelstaedt, Duke, & Mittelstaedt (2009), offers an illustration of this process.

---Insert Figure 1 around here---

Adaptation and interventions in marketing systems

As marketplace antecedents change over time, so too will the marketing systems in which they are embedded. Marketing systems can adapt to external factors through what Layton (2015, p. 303) describes as a generalized Darwinian process where “variation, selection, and replication” brings about change in marketing systems over time, as market participants “struggle for dominance through co-existence, cooperation, competition, coercion and conflict”.

Empirical research offers several illustrative examples of marketing systems effectively adapting to new conditions. For example, marketing systems unified and then segmented the U.S. market (Tedlow 1990), helped the countries of the former Yugoslavia recover from a

war (Shultz et al. 2005), and helped Vietnam transition from a planned economy to a steadily growing market-based one (Shultz 2012). However, fast and effective adaptation is not guaranteed, because certain marketplace antecedents may also inhibit adaptation. For example, Ozanne, Ozanne, & Phipps (2018) illustrate how the affordable housing market in Detroit has been slow to adapt to increasing demand due to stubborn legacy structures such as city regulations that govern building codes.

Though the above examples suggest that marketing systems will adapt and change over time to change internal and environmental circumstances, research suggests that such change is largely emergent and, for all intents and purposes, nearly impossible to predict and manage deliberately. Marketing systems, owing to their inherent complexity, are for all intents and purposes nearly impossible to control (Layton 2014). Any intervention, whether from an active participant or a governing body, will set in motion a chain of events with each system participant anticipating and responding to change in others behavior, as well to change in the system environments. Planned interventions in marketing systems, according to Layton (2014, p 734), are thus akin to a stones cast into a pond: “the splash that follows and the ripples that spread will determine the ultimate outcomes – and these effects will often be unpredictable and to an extent unmanageable in traditional terms”.

Research Framework, Methods, and Data

The following section introduces the three essays that comprise the core of the dissertation. The section identifies the research problems addressed in each essay, the methods and data analysis used, as well as the key findings as they pertain to the overarching research problem

outlined in the introduction. An extended summary of each essay concludes this summary chapter.

As stated earlier, this dissertation addressed the following research question:

How do marketplace participants negotiate change in the marketing system and its antecedents?

Each of the three essays that comprise the dissertation focuses on change in a different part of the marketing system and its environment: Essay I deals with change at the system level, Essay II looks at change in antecedents and its impact on the system, and Essay III examines how marketing system participants seek to influence marketplace antecedents.

Essay I (Klein, Falk, Esch, & Gloukhovtsev 2016) takes as its empirical context the luxury automobile marketplace. In recent years, the once relatively stable marketing system has undergone significant change as new customer demographics have entered the market, demanding a fresh assortment and challenging traditional flows of marketing communication. The study, quantitative in nature, begins by illustrating how marketers have responded to these changes, adapting the retail logic and distribution channels in the system by introducing pop-up and flagship stores to cater to increased demand for novel brand experiences. Analyzing consumer survey data using structural equation modeling, the study illustrates how change in one part of the marketing system – in this case, consumer demographics – has led to change in other parts of the marketing system: market logics, distribution networks, and flow of marketing information, thus impacting the structure of the entire marketing system.

Essay II (Gloukhovtsev, Schouten, Mattila (2018) examines the impact shifting marketplace antecedents on a marketing system. Using the alcohol marketplace in Finland as a qualitative case study, the essay details how Finland's entry into the European Union in 1995 destabilized the local alcohol marketing system. No longer able to directly limit consumer access to foreign marketing systems with broader and cheaper assortments, archival and interview data illustrate how Finnish policymakers sought to intervene indirectly by manipulating various elements of the local marketing system, setting in motion a complex chain of events that reverberated throughout the system. The resulting cat-and-mouse game between policymakers, marketers, and consumers spanned almost two decades, as policymakers and system participants reacted to one another's actions. The findings of the essay highlight the difficulty of managing and controlling complex marketing systems through interventions.

Essay III (unpublished) builds on Essay II by examining the converse relationship between a marketing system and its antecedents. An ethnographic study of the Finnish beer market, the essay examines how marketing system participants can challenge marketplace antecedents. Drawing on observational and interview data, as well as archival material, the study examines how proponents of the craft beer movement in Finland contested local drinking culture, laws and regulations, as well as the structure of the marketing system that favored large firms over small enterprises. The findings show that craft beer entrepreneurs were able to impact the formal, informal, and philosophical marketplace antecedents by establishing strong networks and ties to influential actors in the marketing system, galvanizing support for new market logics that challenged established antecedents. Together with Essay II, this paper shows that change in marketing systems is not unidirectional, but rather that antecedents and system structures will often influence one another.

Taken together, the three essays paint a picture of marketing systems and their participants as dynamic organisms that enact and adapt to change at all levels of the system. In marketing systems, change is seldom isolated and confined to a given part of the system. Instead, change in one part of the system is likely to have a knock-on effect on other system participants and antecedents. This will often result in a cat-and-mouse game as marketers, consumers, policymakers, and other participants each seek to exert their influence on the marketing system with a particular goal or desired outcome in mind.

Summary of Essays

Essay I: Linking pop-up brand stores to brand experience and word of mouth: The case of luxury retail

As customer demographics are changing, luxury brands are facing the challenge of addressing new customer groups without diluting the brand for existing target groups (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009). Luxury brands' strategy is traditionally based on restricting access to the brands in order to create an atmosphere of uniqueness and reverence (Dion & Arnould, 2011). However, as the marketing system evolves, both existing and new target groups are now starting to perceive such a retail strategy as old-fashioned and outdated (Halzack, 2015). Moreover, previously widely-accepted markers of luxury such as high price and country of origin no longer apply (Andehn et al., 2016). Facing the risk of being perceived as old-fashioned and outdated, luxury brands need to seek novel ways of providing brand experiences while reaching out to both existing and new target groups. As consumers' demand for memorable experiences continues to grow, creating superior brand experiences is becoming one of the central objectives in contemporary luxury retail (Kim, Ko, Xu, & Han,

2012). Facing the risk of becoming obsolete in the long run, luxury brands need to find new ways to facilitate consumers' experiences with the brand and reach out to new target groups without diluting the brand for existing customers.

A second change in the marketing system is the growing importance of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. WOM between consumers are increasingly important for brands as they strive to spread their message and to strengthen their image. According to a recent global consumer survey, 83% of consumers claim to trust recommendations from friends and family, while only about 50% trust mass media marketing. WOM communication plays a particularly important role for luxury brands, because activities such as referrals and consumer reporting of positive experiences with a brand increase both the relevance of the brand within target groups and the customers' desire for the brand (Kim & Ko, 2012). As such, the creation of positive WOM is a vital task for luxury brand managers.

This study examines the potential for luxury marketers to address the challenges posed by changes in the marketing system – changing customer demographics and flows of communication - by changing the retail logic prevalent in the market system. The specific focal context of the study is pop-up brand stores. Unlike conventional retail stores, pop-up brand stores are stores that are designed not to sell products, but rather to offer consumers novel experiences. Such stores are becoming a popular experiential marketing tool in luxury retail, aimed at creating brand experiences and increasing word of mouth (WOM) within existing and new target groups simultaneously.

The findings of the study, based on a structural equation modeling analysis of survey data collected from pop-up brand store visitors, illustrate that the new retail logic provides an

effective experiential marketing tool to address the challenges mentioned above. Firstly, the study finds strong support for the use of pop-up brand stores as a complement to traditional luxury retail logics, illustrating a win-win situation in which pop-up brand stores are able to grant consumers a superior brand experience while simultaneously stimulating positive WOM for the luxury brand, particularly among new target groups. The findings suggest that pop-up brand stores induce positive WOM among both existing and new target groups. Specifically, consumers' positive WOM increases consumers' exposure to the brand and thus strengthens the brand beyond the actual visit (Anderson, Fornell, & Mazvancheryl, 2004). In others words, positive WOM not only augments the reach of a luxury brand, but also its relevance, particularly within new target groups that have previously only had limited exposure to the brand (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Essay II: Toward a general framework of regulatory arbitrage: A marketing systems perspective

Regulatory arbitrage – the practice of exploiting differences in laws and regulations across borders – is common among both businesses and consumers. Yet while there is a significant body of studies on the topic, the vast majority is limited to specific contexts such as the regulation of financial markets (Houston, China, and Ma 2012), price controls of pharmaceutical products (Brekke, Holmas, and Straume 2015), and round-tripping of capital (Fung, Yau, and Zhang 2011). Moreover, studies in marketing and management literature tend to limit themselves to the perspective of the arbitraging firm. Extant research focuses almost exclusively on organizational behavior and how firms react strategically to the constraints imposed on them by institutions and regulatory systems, which are largely taken as given (Jackson and Deeg 2008). Outcomes of arbitrage strategies are evaluated from the firm's perspective, with an emphasis on the firm's ability to secure competitive advantage by

appropriately adapting to its regulatory and institutional setting (Martin 2014). While such research is helpful and warranted, the consequences of firms' arbitrage strategies for institutional-level stakeholders remain an under-researched topic (Jackson and Deeg 2008). Few suggestions are offered in terms of how policymakers might address regulatory arbitrage when it might have negative outcomes for social welfare.

Drawing on marketing systems theory, this essay proposes a general conceptualization of regulatory arbitrage that outlines the conditions under which arbitrage is likely to occur. Then, based on an analysis of archival and interview data, the paper illustrates how the conceptualization helps understand regulatory arbitrage in the context of alcohol policy in Finland. Finnish alcohol policy provides a compelling case study of a situation where regulatory arbitrage threatens local policy, yet European free-trade agreements prevent policymakers from limiting access to arbitrage-enabling markets, while harmonization of regulations is undesirable from a policy standpoint.

The findings illustrate how a marketing systems perspective recognizes that the attractiveness of a regulatory arbitrage opportunity depends on assortment disparities that include not only regulatory differences and transaction costs, but also other structural elements of the marketing system. As parallel marketing systems evolve, changes in either system's structural elements—exchange logic and context, network structures and dynamics, economic flows, and governance—can lead to the emergence (or disappearance) of opportunities for regulatory arbitrage, and changes in their attractiveness to would-be arbitrageurs. These findings offer recommendations to policymakers as to the types of levers that can be used to either prevent regulatory arbitrage from occurring, or to intervene in situations where regulatory arbitrage is a problem. Even when policymakers are precluded from raising

transaction costs or harmonizing laws – the standard approaches to regulatory arbitrage, there may be opportunities to mitigate against regulatory arbitrage by decreasing the disparity between two marketing systems' assortments by influencing the structural elements in one or either marketing system.

Essay III: Putting “Marketing” Back in “Social Marketing”: Marketer-Driven Social Movements and Wicked Problems of Consumption

The final essay of the dissertation examines the potential of marketers to address so-called wicked problems of consumption. The concept of wicked problems was first put forward by Rittel and Webber (1973) to describe social problems that are deeply embedded in a social system, complexly determined over a long time period, sustained by a stable equilibrium among multiple stakeholders, resulting in problems resistant to an enduring solution (Kennedy and Parsons 2012). Examples of such wicked problems include obesity, tobacco and alcohol consumption, and environmental degradation.

Scholars agree that wicked problems require system-wide interventions due to the various causes and complex interrelations with multiple issues. Examples abound of governments and social marketers failing to solve wicked problems due limited support from other stakeholders in the social setting where the problem occurs (Hamby, Pierce, & Brinberg 2017). Yet policy and social marketing literature has traditionally been narrow in scope, focusing on downstream interventions at the individual behavioral level rather than the holistic level that wicked problem require (Dibb 2014).

Critical scholarship in social marketing has called for a “systems turn” in the field, arguing that a more holistic approach to wicked problems of consumption is needed (e.g., Luca,

Hibbert, & McDonald 2016). Research has looked at how policymakers (Phipps and Brace-Govan 2011), consumers (Gollnhofer 2016), and social movement organizations (Huff, Barnhart, McAlexander, & McAlexander 2017) can all contribute to eradicating wicked problems of consumption. Surprisingly, despite ample research detailing how marketers can play an important role in supporting social movements (e.g., Weijo, Martin, & Arnould 2018), few studies have looked at how marketers can contribute to social marketing programs. This study explores the potential of marketers to contribute to positive social change efforts by asking, how can private enterprise contribute to social change efforts?

To answer the question, the study examines how Finnish craft beer enterprises challenged the dominant antecedents in the local beer marketplace, changing consumer attitudes towards and consumption practices of beer, and by extension, alcohol in general. Once characterized as a “hegemonic consumptionscape” with a “unidimensional drinking culture” (Falk & Sulkinen, 1981, p. 320) and dominated exclusively by large producers of light lager, recent data from the beer market show healthier consumption patterns, epitomized by declining rates of total beer consumption coupled with a slight rise of interest in specialty beer.

Drawing on interview and observational data from the Finnish beer marketplace, the study reveals the crucial role that marketers can play in driving and fostering social change programs, by influencing marketplace antecedents that structure the market and by extension consumption patterns. Like Humphreys and Carpenter’s (2018) market-driving vintners, entrepreneurs in the craft beer movement played a vital role in shifting consumer attitudes towards alcohol by working to change consumer tastes and preferences rather than conforming to them. Challenging established tastes in the marketplace requires significant symbolic capital, which craft beer marketers were able to attain by coalescing under and

propagating a new common identity for the movement, and establishing a parallel marketing system to serve their purposes. Marketers were also instrumental in helping the new drinking culture acquire cognitive, normative, and regulatory legitimacy, which was also predicated on building and leveraging a marketing system to support the movement. Finally, marketers reshaped the broader beer marketing system to support cultural change by importing new logics into the marketplace that were congruent with the new drinking culture. In doing so, the craft beer movement succeeded where many social movements such as Scaraboto and Fischer's (2012) fatshionistas failed due to a lack of support from sympathetic institutional entrepreneurs.

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