

## Chapter 3

# The Evolution of Consumerism in the Marketing Education: A Critical Discussion Based on Mezirow's Critical Reflection

**George S. Spais**

*Graduate Technological Educational Institute of Western Greece, Greece*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The chapter examines how consumerism—one of the primary key themes in marketing and business courses—has evolved the last decade and envisages the shape of these set of courses in the future. From the 1,935 words for 20 key-concepts counted in 141 online course descriptions in English of the last 10 periods delivered by Business and Management Schools or Business/Marketing Academic Depts. of 88 Universities and Colleges, “Marketing,” “business,” “ethics” and “social responsibility” were included in 100% of the course descriptions analyzed, indicating their coverage by all courses. In order to investigate the five (5) research objectives, HCA was adopted for an exploratory analysis based on single-linkage clustering method to reveal natural groupings of the key concepts within a data set of word counts that were not apparent and then multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. The trend analyses indicated prospects for the increasing focus around specific topics. The interpretation of the research results based on the assumptions of Mezirow's critical reflection provided very strong recommendations.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Consumption of goods and services has risen steadily in industrial countries in the previous century, and it is growing rapidly in many developing countries (Worldwatch Institute, 2013) by a large middle class driving the global economy (e.g., Kharas, 2010). The middle class is an ambiguous social classification, broadly reflecting the ability to lead a comfortable life (e.g., Kharas,

2010). Consumerism, as the new consumption role of the middle class, is majorly emphasized in the economics' literature worldwide (e.g., Murphy, Shleifer & Vishny, 1989; Schor, 1999; Elfick, 2011). There are now more than 2 billion members of the consumer class—nearly half of them in the developing world (Worldwatch Institute, 2013). The new consumption role of the middle class is the axis of a lifestyle and culture that became common in Europe, North America and

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Japan and today is going global (e.g., Worldwatch Institute, 2013).

Today's human economies are designed with little attention to the residuals of production and consumption. WWF's Living Planet Index shows a thirty-five percent decline in Earth's ecological health since 1970. The executive Summary (2008) of the "Breaking the Climate Deadlock Report – A Global Deal for Our Low Carbon Future" (a briefing paper by the Climate Group and McKinsey's Global Institute's consultants) underlines that without a change in energy policies and consumption behavior, global energy demand and energy-related carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions will grow by forty-five percent to 2020. According to the 2011, Annual Energy Outlook (Energy Information Administration of U.S., 2011) energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will grow by 16 percent from 2009 to 2035, reaching 6.3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (or 1.7 GtC).

Further, individuals often face personal costs associated with heavy consumption (Worldwatch Institute, 2013): i) the financial debt; the time and stress associated with working to support high consumption; ii) the time required to clean, upgrade, store, or otherwise maintain possessions; and iii) the ways in which consumption replaces time with family and friends. Mass consumption is responsible for the decline in health indicators in western societies.

According to Worldwatch Institute (2013) consumer advocates, economists, environmentalists and policymakers are developing creative solutions for responding social needs while dampening the environmental and social costs associated with mass consumption. In addition, helping individuals find the consuming balance, they stress placing more emphasis on publicly provided goods and services, on services in place of goods, on goods with high levels of recycled content, and on genuine choice for consumers. Definitely, governments can reshape economic incentives and regulations but this is not enough.

Without the active participation of the truly marketing oriented organizations, social behavior in the sense of encouraging responsible consumption with ecological imperative is meaningless. Only businesses can radically transform their customers through continuous sensitization and critical reflection.

Based on the above, it is quite easy for anyone to blame the toady marketing practitioners, as Drucker (1969) done it 44 years ago -and it seems that he was right. If there is a serious reason to blame the marketing society, then there is a responsibility share that marketing educators must carry. The marketing educators today have to transform the meaning perspectives of societal marketing and social behavior of businesses and this has a profound impact on marketing educators' life in and out of the class. It changes the way they see themselves (as consumers, as teachers and as philosophers) and it changes the way they continue to learn and construe new meanings about the marketing world become critically reflective on their assumptions of marketing discipline. By strengthening involvement of observation, asking questions, putting facts, new ideas, and marketing and promotion experiences together to derive new meaning of consumerism based on critical thinking leading them and the learners to a new set of personal values and ethics. This new meaning may benefit themselves, the organizations they choose to work for, and society as a whole (Rundle-Thiele & Wymer, 2010). Based on the above, this study examines how consumerism key concept in marketing and business courses such as: "corporate social responsibility", "marketing ethics", "business ethics", "social marketing", "marketing and society", "green marketing" and "sustainable marketing" has evolved the last decade (2003-2013) and envisages the shape of these set of courses in the next years (from 2013-2014 to 2015-2016).

Although consumerism has received attention by the most well-known scholars of marketing science (Drucker, 1969; Kotler, 1972a, 1972b;

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