

Marketing Research and Culture : Some European Insights

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Introduction

The subject that we are going to consider is a difficult one. Specialists that attempt to come to terms with the specifics of a European approach to marketing are generally faced with three problems :

1. The political, social and cultural context of the environment influences any marketing research because of the latter's vocation and nature. One can easily understand that the diversity and complexity of the European continent leads us to speak of different approaches to marketing in Europe as opposed to a European marketing.

2. If one cannot speak of a unique and homogeneous European marketing, it is equally difficult to identify European schools of thought that have evolved in an independent way from the American school.

In reality, it is less the technical analysis or the new concepts that enabled European marketing to differentiate itself than the different ways of appreciating events in companies, an analysis often divergent from the American vision of business life and the importance of the economic world in the life of a State, of its citizens and its employees. 3. Whatever the marketing problem studied, the United States has not only the financial muscle and methods of exchanging information unsurpassed in Europe, but also the extraordinary capacity to expose talents and to discover new areas of research.

We will thus consider the European "sensitiveness" for methods of approaching different subjects and touch on some of the areas of studies developed in Europe which, from our point of view, will perfectly illustrate this different European "sensitiveness".

The European Approach : a few Methodological Characteristics.

Logical empiricism or logical positivism remain today the dominant model for the epistemologic reflection, imposed by the American school of thought, in the scientific field of marketing.

Numerous authors have nevertheless criticised this method and proposed that new "formulae" should be set up, that would favour more dialectic and contradictory approaches.

The three principal criticisms held by the Europeans against the American school of

thought are largely inspired by some American homologues :

- the challenge of the existence of a unique method and set of procedures that can generate a scientific and true solution whatever the circumstances,

- the criticism of a scientific approach deemed to rely too much on the certainty of results and leading to the development of more and more complex and "technical" methods,

- the questioning of the general, superficial and mean (in the statistical sense of the word) character of the leading marketing models faced with the multidimensional and hyperspecific nature of the environment.

We will attempt to raise a diagram of a few of the replies to these critics and to summarise the "sensitiveness" of the European methods.

Some Innovative European Research Topics : Research into Marketing as a Cultural Product.

If one conceives research to be a random and opportunist process, then the national "marketing specialities" can be seen as the fruit of a particular talent and of "one-off" opportunities. The answer to international tender offers, the talented researcher's personal inclination, the setting up of collaborations based on personal affinities, are therefore the best variables to explain the research areas covered and preferred in a specific country.

Even though research cannot be conducted by decree, we believe that a researcher is nevertheless influenced in his choice by his environment, his history, his education and the professional world he is immersed in. Following this logic, it is therefore not surprising that the Italians favoured a more aesthetic approach and a post-modern interpretation of consumption behaviours, that the French have imagined a more sociological manner of dealing with marketing, or that the Dutch have become the specialists in intercultural marketing and management whilst the Scandinavians hold the lead in internal and relationship marketing in Europe.

We do not have the possibility to present the totality of the areas of research done in each country. If we stay away from an ethnocentric consideration of the works done, we do not declare that the research done in Europe is very different to the studies done in the United States.

However, we would, as an example, like to retain four areas that we consider as being worthy of attention since they are perfectly representative of certain European marketing management contexts.