

Marketing in Food, Hospitality, Tourism and Events

A Critical Approach

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7 Interpreting Marketing

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Interpreting Marketing

■ Introduction

There are certain assumptions within contemporary marketing about the consumer's behaviour, how they make decisions and how they understand marketing communications. As a result, marketers identify groups that are clustered together in neat market segments ranging from the macro level in which we target cultures or genders, to the micro where we target small groups of consumers that share similar backgrounds, income, education or locality etc. This approach assumes that these groups of consumers share a view of the world, a set of values and a level of knowledge that leads to a shared understanding and relationship to the product being promoted and the process of marketing. Although segmentation remains the dominant means of grouping consumers together and identifying target markets, this chapter relocates the individual consumer at the centre of the marketing process by recognising that each individual consumer or customer will bring with them their own experience, knowledge etc. That is, they are reflexive subjects who do not simply accept the messages propagated by marketers, but interpret, resist, negotiate and form their own perception of the marketing message. In order to gain and insight into how people understand marketing it is important to identify some of theoretical debates that go some of the way to explaining how individual's interpret the debates and discourses that underpin THEF marketing. Additionally, in order to understand the consumer's relationship to marketing communications it is important to understand how authors, organisations or professional bodies

select and produce marketing texts, as the nature of the publication will also guide the final interpretation. For example the authors of this book come from differing academic traditions, one from a social science background and the other from a business tradition, however the content and structure of this book is guided by certain shared beliefs about the role of marketing in contemporary society and a dissatisfaction with the ways in which traditional marketing texts locate the consumer and the marketing process. Therefore this book reflects the knowledge base, the values and the reality of the two authors as white, middle-class university lecturers.

Just like the authors, each individual consumer or customer brings with them a set of knowledge, a view of their position in the world and their personal values. These are formed by their social and cultural backgrounds, their gender, their educational background, and their geographical location, the influence of their friends or families amongst other influences. These personal influences can be categorised as three distinct areas, epistemological, ontological and axiological (for good discussion of these aspects see Bryman 2004: 21–24). It is these areas of the individual's experience or personality that define the way in which they relate to the marketing process and the product or service being sold. These three areas can be simply defined as shown in Figure 7.1.

Epistemology (Knowledge base)	Ontology (Position in world)	Axiology (Value systems)
Relationship with marketing informed by	Relationship with marketing informed by	Relationship with marketing informed by
Knowledge How materials produced Authority of materials Individual's perception Individual's memory Individual's consciousness Individual's reason	Individual reality Individual influences Social and cultural background Class Education Religion Race Geographical roots	Their values Morals Informed by epistemology and ontology

Figure 7.1: Marketing and Epistemology, Ontology and Axiology