CHAPTER 3
WHY DO MARKETERS DO WHAT THEY DO?

Is marketing ethical?

There are many people around the world—and in the U.S. as well—who wonder how marketers can do what they do without feeling sick to their stomachs. It is the same feeling I get when I read about the tobacco companies and the managers who work for them. How can they face their children? Their spouses? Even themselves in the mirror?

My own solution has always been to believe in the product I am selling. If you can convince yourself that the product or service you are selling yields positive benefits to the customer, that it’s “good” in the sense that the customer will be better off for having bought it, then you are doing something good. A good product is by itself not enough, of course. In-your-face marketing involves tactics that can appall and affront people, regardless of the essential goodness of the product. But, a starting point for “ethical” marketing must be that the product is good. I teach this to my MBA students, and have had some of them (though not all) quit companies like Philip Morris for that reason. Other students, of course, do not even consider working for some of the companies disparaged for similar reasons.

Whether or not a product yields positive benefits can of course be a tricky question, especially since in many advanced markets, the needs satisfied are typically not very basic. I mean, we
are not usually talking about feeding the poor and hungry or offering a drink to the thirsty masses. Marketers tend to make use of a theory of needs that is hierarchical, meaning that once basic survival needs are satisfied, there are higher order needs—the need for recognition, for achievement, for belonging, and so on—which also have to be satisfied for a person to be happy. A product that makes a person feel good is therefore also a “good” product to sell. While marketers prefer to speak of “satisfaction” instead of “happiness,” there is always at least an implicit assumption that products and services will bring happiness to a person’s life. This assumption is the source of the materialistic and commercialization dynamic of marketing. “We bring good things to life” as the General Electric slogan goes.

In-Your-Face Logic

The in-your-face marketing efforts discussed here, however, go way beyond the question of the goodness of the product. In fact, in many cases, the product itself is only tangentially involved in the effort. This is because to a marketer, perception is everything. A high-speed computer is a high-speed computer only if the customer thinks it is a high-speed computer. Think about it for a second and you’ll see how it works. Take a car, for example. How do you judge if the car is fast or not? Figures seem to tell the story—“0–60 in 8 seconds”—but most people don’t know how to read the numbers. “Sportiness” is the typical attribute automakers use, and this comes from styling, something everyone can judge. Now take a more mundane product like a bar of soap. How soft is it on the skin? According to market research, most people apparently use perfume strength to assess softness. Anyone can smell the soap. How about food and drink? Well, we know that people can tell beers apart when tasting—but only if they are allowed to see the bottles (although Guinness stout is an exception). As for food, there is not much scientific evidence that I have seen, but think about the effect on people when you tell them sushi is raw fish, or that chicken breast is actually rabbit meat. I make my
students squirm in their seats when I tell them Swedes are very fond of smoked horsemeat. I doubt the same reaction would occur if they tasted it and were simply told it was smoked venison. Perception might not be everything, but it’s small wonder if for marketers it seems more important than the product itself.

This is why the marketing efforts discussed in this book go far beyond the product. They also involve the design, the color, the brand name, the logo, and the whole marketing communications apparatus. In fact, the in-your-face marketing effort that affronts me most is the repetitive advertising slogans and noisy commercials I see on TV and hear on the radio. It’s not easy to illustrate this on the written page, but we all have our favorite offenders. For me, the worst are the loud and abrasive TV commercials (with lots of sex, confrontation, and “attitude”) my teenage daughters see, but then I am not in that market, so those shouldn’t really count (I do tell them, however, to please watch something else). But how about those inane car commercials about zero financing, the insipid beer commercials touting sentimental patriotism, and Bob Dole hawking Viagra? Talk about a product to believe in—at least he is a person one can empathize with.

Promotional tactics
A few features make for the in-your-face character of many of these commercials. As you may have noticed already, when the commercials on TV come on, the volume automatically increases slightly. This is to catch your attention. The same intent is behind the quick editing and striking images that typically are used to pull you into the commercial’s story. This can involve sex and violence, as we all know. Sometimes, the beginning trades on what is called “fear appeal,” as when the tires of a car slip on a wet road, with a young mother driving and a baby in a baby-seat. Sex, violence, fear, and guilt are always assumed to be reliable motivators, used as glue to hook you to the screen. Not surprisingly, to choose between alternative cuts and edits of a commercial, ad agencies sometimes use tools such as pupil dilation measures, eye movement cameras, and “galvanic skin response,” electrodes to monitor sweaty palms.
Having established “the problem,” the story usually moves into a more rational mode, explaining why the advertised brand might in fact help solve the problem better than any of the competing brands on the market. These kinds of problem-solving commercials are staples of brands from many packaged goods manufacturers and are really not that objectionable, except when they try to get low-involvement products to seem very important for your emotional well-being. If you are “in the market” for some of these mundane products, getting some comparative evaluation of battery life, absorptive capacity of paper towels, or why a particular toothpaste fights cavities better than all the others, no real harm is done. If you are not in the market, you can just tune out—like we all do.

A lot of the in-your-face advertising really has little or no problem-solving purpose at a functional level. Rather, it plays on insecurity and inexperience, as well as a desire for status and other higher order needs to create emotional tensions (emotional “problems,” if you will) that can then be cured by choosing the right brand. The situations often involve individual aspirations and social pressure. The commercials depict the dejection that comes from the disapproval of some significant other, and the subsequent catharsis that choosing the right brand will yield. Contrary to what you might suppose, this is not a simple logic that applies only to teenagers, but is at work in all segments of the market—and with all kinds of products and services. These kinds of emotional appeals are used for personal care products and apparel most decidedly, but also in ads for household products (the “good mother” image of Pampers), for major purchases such as computers and automobiles, and even in business-to-business markets (the way IBM and FedEx play on their recognition factor, for example). The right choice of brand will ease the tension, satisfy the customer, and fill a need, albeit a higher order one, awakened by the promotion. We might think we are immune to such obvious “tricks,” but research consistently shows that such denials are empty gestures. For example, back in the 1970s when generic brands first appeared in the stores, even the black and white “Beer” cans turned out to have their own special
cachet. My older daughter’s Army surplus shirt makes its own statement. People are social animals.

In-your-face promotion also, of course, includes all that repetitive advertising that we see and hear, impressing brands and their slogans on everybody’s mind. We all know the way jingles, logos, and spokespersons (or cartoons, or animals—take your pick) for certain products “help” us remember the appropriate brand name. It’s Ronald McDonald, the Bud-wei-ser frogs, the “just-do-it” swoosh. These reminders are intended to be in your face quite literally, so that when the time comes to make a choice, you “naturally” and without thought reach for the embedded brand—or get upset if you can’t find it on the shelf. In the beginning, marketers thought that these repetitive messages would be useful only for the first three occasions or so (after which a fatigue factor would reduce the effect to nil or negative), and then only for low-involvement, impulse-style products, where choices become almost instinctive. These research findings might still be valid in some countries, but the clutter of commercial messages in the U.S. has grown so dense that marketers have apparently decided to keep the barrage going for most kinds of products. The reason is simply that as the noise has grown, we have become increasingly desensitized, losing the use of our senses the way hard-rock fans lose their hearing. This is why in-your-face promotions sometimes seem akin to a frustrated parent shouting at his or her multitasking offspring: “Listen to me!”

The Marketer’s View of People

Sometimes when I see TV commercials, I wonder what the marketers really think of people. They must think we are imbeciles or something. Where do they get this idea? It usually does not take me long to decipher the answer. After all, some of the research that we present to our students in the classroom gives a pretty good idea about how we in marketing view people. I know many of you might think that all the lip service to “our customers are the most important people” is bunk, but really, marketers do
think that customers are important. It's just that we don't think our customers are really that smart.

I don't say that we marketers are any smarter, but the way it works is that when a marketer looks at all the research evidence about how consumers behave, it is difficult not to start thinking that people really are pretty incoherent shoppers. I should say right away that the reasons for this have more to do with the time and effort we spend on evaluating products and services than with any innate level of intelligence. Even the most educated and intelligent individual is capable of being influenced willy-nilly by some clever promotion and of making the most atrocious purchase decisions. I think you know what I mean; we all let our guard down at times. We buy useless things because they are on sale; we buy “American-made” only to find out the goods were made in China; or, we order a high-tech mosquito killer after seeing it advertised on TV, forgetting that we don’t have electricity in the backyard. One of my esteemed colleagues stocked up on cases of French champagne as an investment, not realizing that the fizz dissipates over time.

Marketers do scientific research to back up such anecdotal evidence. Some of it is elegant and simple, as when two random samples of homemakers were shown a shopping list that differed only by one item. One list included “Maxwell House coffee,” while the other list had “Nescafe instant coffee.” When asked to describe the housewife with such a shopping list, the two samples differed significantly, with those shown the second list imagining a careless and irresponsible housewife. This was despite the fact that prior personal interviews had revealed no negative attitude toward instant coffee. Another small test involved lining the pockets of identical overcoats with different materials and asking people to compare them. Invariably, pockets lined with softer material scored higher quality ratings. You have probably heard about the various blind tests of soft drinks, beer, and various snacks. Even devoted Coca-Cola drinkers, who forced the com-

pany to get back to “Classic” Coke, had not realized that the cola formula had been changed several times during their lifetime, but without announcements or packaging changes.² Without the logos available to view, there have apparently even been cases where colas and non-colas could not be reliably distinguished.³ It sure is hard sometimes to take people’s opinions seriously.

A lot of market research involves sophisticated design and large-scale data collection. Branding research, for example, which tries to assess the value of various brands, involves large surveys of respondents queried about a wide variety of brands. Research for new products can involve sophisticated analyses of consumers’ responses to alternative designs, projecting laboratory test results to a forecast of market shares. Alternative promotional tools—things like coupons versus in-store cents-off, special aisle displays, or free home samples—are evaluated through computer-based analyses of massive sets of supermarket scanner data. For many of us marketers, these kinds of sophisticated scientific endeavors help to shield us from the realization that we are, in fact, evaluating means for manipulating people.

The empowered consumer?
Since the arrival of one-to-one marketing, the Internet, and relationship marketing, there has been much talk about the emergence of the empowered consumer. Marketers can no longer dictate what consumers should buy and use. Consumers are in control of the communications with any seller, expressing preferences, evaluating alternative prototypes, and even designing their own products, from cars and computers to shirts and shoes.

This glowing picture is correct as far as it goes. But because of the huge number of products and the massive communication efforts to sell them, consumers have little time to spend on any one single product or brand—unless, of course, shopping is all they do.

³ I heard this asserted once in an academic conference, but I have not yet seen it documented scientifically. As a consumer of soft drinks I find it hard to believe, but then, that’s exactly the point—as consumers we are not as smart as we think.
Not surprisingly, while most consumers do spend at least some time on products or services that hold a particular interest—your tennis and golf, my classical music and opera, someone else's vintage cars and motorcycles—our empowerment to find out more about mortgage refinancing, cholesterol levels in salad dressings, and the energy efficiency of electric cars goes unheeded. There is just too much.

The sheer volume of products and services, coupled with their ever shorter lifecycles and the accompanying promotional noise, would lead one to suspect that consumers in the U.S. are less in control of things than before. I am not aware of any definite research to document this, and I am not sure consumers themselves would agree. I can hear my daughters’ protests when I suggest that they are influenced by advertising. But we marketers know better—and the most recent research suggests that things are even worse than before.

In August 2003, a colleague and I went to the American Marketing Association meetings in Chicago to interview potential candidates for a position as an assistant professor at Georgetown. Hiring in the academic profession involves personal interviews with candidates, and a conference is a natural occasion since people gather from all over the world to attend. The interview tends to focus on the research that the candidate is doing for his or her doctoral dissertation. The topics naturally reflect the current trends in the profession. I expected to hear a lot about the “empowered” consumer from the 29 candidates we were scheduled to interview over the three-day period. I heard a lot of the opposite.

Before I talk about some of the candidates’ research, please let me emphasize that this is clearly not a random sample of research in marketing. What companies do is in some ways different, since their research has more of a “bottom line” profitability orientation than academic research. Also, our 29 candidates were not randomly selected—we wanted someone who would teach our courses, but would also fit Georgetown’s general research thrust into international, public policy, and ethics topics. But, the 29 were the best candidates from the best universities across this country and elsewhere. We interviewed doctoral students from
Columbia and Wharton, from UCLA and Stanford, from Northwestern, Florida, Michigan, and INSEAD, a leading business school in France.

**State of the art**

Of the 29 cases, no less than 22 did research on some aspect of what we call “consumer behavior,” investigating the psychological and sociological factors that underlie a consumer’s way of dealing with the marketplace of today. Three focused on how people deal with risky choices, a traditional topic confirming that women still tend to take less risks than men. Another three studied customer satisfaction—another traditional topic—one study showing how satisfaction can be influenced (manipulated?) by information and events that recalibrate expectations downward (one possibility is to simply wait with delivery of a product so that the immediate post-purchase euphoria can be given time to die down—Amazon.com covered that angle, it would seem). No less than seven studies focused on the role of emotion or “affect” in brand choice. The emotional attachment to a brand is by now a “given” in marketing, and the question is more how to create and nurse it. One candidate discussed his study of how emotional attachment can exacerbate any failure of a favorite brand—people really feel cheated.4 Can the warm aura of sincerity around your brand get too hot? There is also clear evidence that people eat more when feeling down. More popcorn is consumed when watching sad movies than happy movies—although the viewers themselves don’t seem to recognize this.5

I thought I would see some study of how people have now taken charge of their own consumer destiny. I guess I was biased, but honestly, there was very little of that. Instead, there were a cou-


ple of studies of how incidental information about unrelated product categories (the Internet banner ads that suddenly pop up, for example) can influence choice, how the order of presentation (what is called framing in psychology) influences people’s judgments, and how a large number of choices lowers people’s confidence in making the best choice. There was also a study of how people cope with consumer stress, something that would be useful for us here, but the study area is still in its infancy. The preliminary findings are that people who think themselves capable will do something about the stress; others will simply avoid facing the problem.

One of the nails in the coffin for the “empowered” consumer came from a study of rebate redemption rates. Rebates are particularly popular promotional tools used by technology retailers—cell phone marketing is a case in point—but they are also popular for packaged goods, where they are the number two tool after coupons. Redemption rates vary, but are generally low—less than 50% for big-ticket technology goods, and as low as 2% for packaged goods. Conventional wisdom would suggest that the redemption rate would increase as the dollar amount of the rebate goes higher since the gains are greater. The rate should also increase with the length of the redemption period, since the consumer has more time to submit the paperwork. The study did not support this conventional wisdom. The purchase rate increased, that is, more people bought when the amount and length of the period increased. But the redemption rate was largely not affected by the amount


offered, and by extending the time limit, redemption rates actually decreased. This leads one to believe that when people are given plenty of time to do something, it never gets done. Advice for companies: Offer big rebates and give people a lot of time to redeem. You sell more, and it costs less.

To me, the most disconcerting study was one that tested whether ads work when people are warned of the persuasive intent (such as reminding people that the Marlboro cowboy is only trying to sell cigarettes).9 In this study people were shown an advertisement for a shampoo, the ad coupled with the picture of a beautiful beach. The typical “creative” idea is that the beautiful beach would make people feel good about the shampoo brand. The study tried to stop the formation of this association by asking subjects to remember that the advertiser was only trying to sell shampoo. The well-established “Elaboration Likelihood Model” suggests that conscious reasoning should counter this kind of weak persuasive effort. However, the study found precisely the opposite: the association became stronger when subjects were asked to explicitly argue against the ad’s influence. Subjects could not consciously stop the formation of a positive attitude toward the brand. The more we argue against something, the more we like it?

This finding also weakens the comfort of the thought that consumers are on to what marketers do. Research suggests that consumers do understand the “persuasion schemas” that marketers employ, that there is a certain sequence of tactics employed to gain compliance from the consumer.10 But if the persuasion works despite this consciousness, it is truly hard to defend yourself against marketers’ influence.

I must emphasize that in no way do I wish to somehow indict these projects for their choice of topics. These are very valid aca-

9. By Maria Galli of INSEAD, France. Quoted with permission. The research is reported in Maria Galli, Amitava Chattopadhyay, and C. Miguel Breindl, “Persuasion Via Associative Mechanisms: Are We In Control?,” INSEAD working paper, 2004.

ademic subjects and are equally useful on either side of any debate, pro or con consumers. I should also caution, again, that these are only “selections” of current academic research in marketing. Furthermore, most of the studies have not yet been subjected to the peer review necessary to pass muster in the profession. Nevertheless, the absence of optimistic pronouncements of a sovereign and empowered consumer was striking. There was little or no evidence that consumer paradise was here, that consumers were freer than ever. Rather, I came away with the feeling that consumerspace is a cage in which many of us are trapped. Yes, we have all the products and all the excitement we want and more, but we don’t seem to cope very coherently with our situation. Are we the Osbournes?

Marketing know-how
For most real-world marketers, these new academic findings are still treated as just that, “academic.” But, there are a few long-established market research findings that really resonate with most marketing practitioners and that I think help explain why marketers do what they do. They are the kinds of insights that constitute part of what is known as “marketing know-how,” but some might call them “tricks of the trade.” They reflect how marketers think of people. Here are five selections:

1. “Mere exposure”—Exposing an audience to a certain message and then repeating it over and over again tends to generate a positive change in attitude—not just an acceptance of the message, but a positive attitude toward it. For example, popular hit songs tend to be those that people are able to hear repeatedly over the airwaves. While the initial reaction to something new and unfamiliar may be negative, just hearing or seeing it repeatedly makes it more familiar and acceptable. Thus, the repetition of slogans: They may seem annoying, but the theory is that they become part of the familiar and thus comfortable environment. Bush’s “staying on message” strategy when discussing Iraq is a good illustration of this principle. It is mere exposure.
2. “Luxury becomes necessity”—Once luxury is tasted, it becomes a necessity. Just as for Adam after Eve’s apple, there is no return to Paradise. There is no going back; levels of aspirations will always rise as possessions increase. Materialism is unlikely to bring happiness on its own. It takes almost a religious conversion to swear off the never-ending spiral. “Affluenza” is a great example of how this works, and how it has affected Americans’ willingness to work hard and take no vacations.

3. “Money is relative”—Beyond mere survival, relative income is what matters. It was an economist, James Due senberry, who first argued that increasing prosperity will not necessarily lead to greater satisfaction. The key is improving one’s lot vis-à-vis one’s neighbor’s. Not just “keeping up with the Jones’s,” but “beating the Jones’s.” When everybody else loses more in the stock market than you do, your relative wealth has gone up. The fact that we marketers bring good things to poor people is not enough. We also have to make sure the distribution is seen as fair, which presents a tough problem with free markets.

4. “New choices create headaches”—Becoming aware of new alternatives has the effect of making current possessions seem less valuable. Opening markets to new products and services will easily create tension and dissatisfaction. Knowing that you can have a Hummer will reduce the satisfaction level for many SUV owners. When a company introduces its brand in a foreign market, not only will domestic competitors be pressured, but so will many consumers.

5. “Foot in the door”—While a potential customer may be reluctant to commit to one major purchase, presenting a smaller and more affordable first sacrifice makes later incremental charges more acceptable. This is an example of a “You give them a hand, they’ll take the arm” kind of thing. This is why the “Try it at home and return it if not satisfied” promotion works—few will return the goods. The entry of a McDonald’s outlet in a new country might
seem a small and unremarkable step, but really, it takes on a much greater significance.

So, marketers do not have such an uplifting view of human nature. If they think that they have a good product to sell—a judgment perhaps based on market test results—they see nothing wrong with trying to tell prospective customers about it. The objections—people don’t want to hear about it, they are already satisfied with existing products, there is little need for the new product—are ignored. Taking such an objection to “innovation” seriously would not only stop the enterprise—and the economy—in its tracks, people do not really know what they want anyway. So, marketers tend to use an in-your-face approach to get your attention, to point to a problem that you did not know you had, to present their product’s alleged benefits, and to repeat the brand name enough times so that it is embedded in your consciousness.

Competitive Pressure

Regardless of how benign or cynical a marketer’s view of people is, the intensity of competitive rivalry in open and free markets will frequently be a dominating factor in strategic and tactical marketing decision-making. One can even say that a lot of the in-your-face efforts come from marketers set on dominating competitors, and going over the top in their effort.

In a sense, competition has always been a factor as long as marketing has been around, in fact as long as business has been around. After all, the key ingredient in a successful business is to provide a differentiating benefit, something that the competition cannot offer, something that generates a sustainable competitive advantage. One reason why the in-your-face efforts in marketing have risen to new heights is simply that the intensity of competition has grown apace with the globalization of markets.

Partly it is a question of numbers. Open and free markets entice new entrants who help raise the promotional intensity in an industry. Having more advertisers means having more advertising. But, perhaps what matters more is the fact that the competitive battle has shifted from product differentiation to less tangible
attributes such as brand image and style. The rapid diffusion of technology and rejection of the “not invented here” syndrome have helped many companies incorporate new features from competitors into their own products, obliterating their competitors’ advantages. This is why consumer choices in advanced countries depend so much on price and promotion, forcing companies to go to ever greater efforts to hype their offerings.

This was neither an obvious nor easily predictable result from globalization. There was no real reason to expect companies’ products to become more alike. It was the emergence of best practices, reverse-engineering, and imitative design that led to a greater importance of promotion. The shift in thinking was mostly due to the Japanese companies’ success with imitative product design strategies. As we will see later, the Japanese preference to not necessarily bring new products and new features to the marketplace, but to improve versions of the existing market leaders, is one explanation why their approach overseas seemed so much better attuned to the local conditions than the American way of doing it.

It is not surprising that the shift to communications and promotions as differentiation devices also has meant more and louder promotional efforts than before. Since functional differences between products are relatively minor, promotion of brand and image is the only way to avoid debilitating price competition. If one competitor tries to lower the pressure, other competitors will gain. Many companies advertise heavily to at least match their competition, not really being able to gauge the effectiveness (or lack of it) of the effort. Increasing the stridency and the amount of the effort serves to attract the attention of the prospects and dominate competitors. Then, if people behave as marketers suppose, there is a chance to convert a prospect to a customer. All in all, it is not a pretty scenario.

Marketing as warfare

The marketing activities that many of us are most familiar with are not so obviously based on the idea of satisfying our needs and preferences. This is because the markets in many developed
countries are basically mature, even saturated. Marketing involves as much the creation of needs and wants as the satisfaction of them. Actually, marketing often has to start with the creation of dissatisfaction, making you displeased with the state of your present possessions. Only then will you be open to information about “new and improved” options. Marketers frequently compare marketing to warfare, with branding strategies conceived as an attack on a competitor’s stronghold rather than simply satisfying customer needs.

The idea of marketing as warfare has a fairly long history, and does crop up now and then in most academic texts on marketing management. In 1986, a book entitled *Marketing Warfare* was published by two well-known advertising consultants, Al Ries and Jack Trout. They applied the military strategy principles of von Clausewitz to marketing strategy. Strikingly, comparing marketing efforts to military action means that competitors are the enemy, while consumers become the battlefield. As the authors proclaim at the outset: “The true nature of marketing today is not serving the customer; it is outwitting, outflanking, outfighting your competition. In short, marketing is war where the enemy is the competition and the customer is the ground to be won.”

For all its assumed “empowerment” of the consumer, the Internet go-go years of the 1990s did not diminish the relevance of this analogy. As the Preface to the 1998 reprint of the book states: “A decade ago, the term ‘global economy’ didn’t exist....Today’s marketplace makes the one we wrote about look like a tea party. The wars are escalating and breaking out in every part of the globe....All this means that the principles of *Marketing Warfare* are more important than ever.”

Albeit one should not take such promotional hyperbole at face value; such language is regrettable. However, the point about military strategic thinking being part and parcel of marketing

12. Ibid.
remains. For example, it is easy to relate the emphasis of von Clausewitz (and current American military doctrine) on the use of dominant force directly to the consolidation of businesses and the concentration of marketing spending behind a few global power brands. Big beats small.

Today’s emphasis on the importance of the brand has not diminished the war-type rhetoric used by marketers—quite the contrary. Other contributing factors of course might be the political and military situations in the country, although it really seems farfetched to ascribe any direct effect from the Iraq war. In any case, a reasonable person might well shudder reading the titles of the current crop of branding business books: How to Build a Killer Brand, Differentiate or Die: Survival in the Era of Killer Competition, Warp-speed Branding, Only the Paranoid Survive. These are not very encouraging metaphors.

Damned If You Do...

The upshot of the marketer’s view of people, the need to make a profit, and the current competitive climate is that there seem to be few options to using strong promotional tools. The marketer has an arsenal of weapons by which a potential customer’s objections or reluctance may be overcome. These tools are by no means perfect and never-failing. In fact, it takes a great deal of cultural fine-tuning to generate just the right kind of sales message—and then the effort may prove futile anyway. What is important, however, is that the marketer is always in a selling mode and that there are tools that can be—and are—used to persuade the prospect. As we say in our marketing classes: As marketers, we must make sure that we are selling products we believe in, products that can improve the buyers’ lives. Trust me?

For non-Americans, the price they pay for opening their markets is higher than it seems to Americans. They will be inundated with strident efforts from entrants without the national legitimacy or cultural understanding to convince them to improve their lot by buying new products and brands, to get rid of their old possessions. The benefits they get are not as great as for the Americans,
since many of the products are not adapted to their specific culture or environment. The chance to arrive at a higher standard of living is compromised by a new focus on material possessions and economic comparisons, while leaving less room for past attention to local culture. On top of that, given the age-old conflicts between neighbors of different ethnicities in the old countries, one should not be surprised to find that the new wealth, unevenly distributed, helps to exacerbate already tense relationships. Avoiding conspicuous consumption might still be feasible in a country such as the U.S. where everyone is told from childhood that they can succeed. It is a less likely possibility in countries with zero-sum situations of one player gets all, the rest nothing, and envy of your neighbor is a dominant cultural trait. The new products and brands become weapons in age-old rivalries in these countries, so that the freer and more open marketplace creates rather than overcomes frustrations. Channeling such frustrations into an anti-global attitude is just a short step away.