

Postmodernism and marketing

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



Due to its profound effect on individualistic side of consumer and consumption, it is inevitable that marketing is also affected deeply by postmodernism. Hence, those who would like to make a long run and satisfying profit have to develop at least a basic understanding of the terms "postmodern" and "postmodern marketing". It would be more convenient to give some basic knowledge about postmodernism before explaining its huge effect on the discipline of marketing.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica postmodernism is defined as a "late 20th-century movement characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining latitude and economic power".

Postmodernism can be viewed as a criticism to 20th century modernism. It is a resistance to modernist ideas such as freedom, progress and liberty. It is much more about destruction of old theories, criticizing the modern and its values rather than proposing a solution to give order or something new.

As First, Sherry and Venkatesh argue postmodernist looks for a universally accepted or agreed upon principle; that of tolerance and acceptance of difference. To sum up, while modernism has designed the grand projects to prevent failure, postmodernism as recognized such projects as failures themselves. After a brief explanation about postmodernism, it would be reasonable to give a marketing oriented definition of postmodernism before starting to discuss its huge influence on the discipline of marketing.

According to Gerri & Van Iraqi (1998) postmodernism can be defined as "a cultural episode, characterized by a pluralism of styles (of consumption) and

ideologies, a need for hyperthermia and self-expression through consumption". After contemplating on this brief definition, it would not be hard to conclude that postmodernism has had a profound effect on the consumption tatters of individuals. Therefore, companies have been forced to take individualistic differences into account and develop strategies based on their own target customer group.

However, the influence of postmodernism on marketing and businesses is not limited to the change in consumer preferences or the change in consumption patterns. The structure of an organization, and the organization's relationship with its employees are also affected by the birth and extensive usage of the term postmodernism. To begin with the effect of the term " postmodernism" on the customer side, it can be argued that it has brought a new phenomenon of postmodern marketing. In the modern marketing, a company generally makes some standardization in terms of what a customer needs, wants or desires by evaluating the society as a whole.

In the evaluation process, a majority of them focus on the shared characteristics or personalities of customers and begin to make production and even customization according to a common, shared perspective. Naturally, they have a tendency to ignore customers who have a very different worldview, personality, preference or choice. Thus, those who make production do not have to worry about the diversity of customers in terms of attitudes, perception, personality etc. Since they produce goods and services in massive amounts and then advertise these goods and services to masses.

Then, they expect their products to be consumed without any challenge by different consumer demands. This situation is partly a result of homogeneity and masculinity concepts of modernism. However, with postmodernism all these approaches have been affected. Unless having an understanding about the diversity of consumer behavior, a firm might not be able to hose its target customer group correctly, which is a situation that makes its production meaningless, since in the end the product or service might end up with appealing to no one.

Also, in today's world companies have to give much importance to different groups such as gays, lesbians, gypsies etc. Since they have become to constitute a portion of the society that is not negligible. In fact those who took a quicker action than others to offer production or services appealing totally to such groups have made enormous profit. Moreover, the masculine culture has been placed by a more feminine culture in many areas of business due to the change in consumption patterns. For example, during ass Marlboro was using fancy letters. Then, it turned out that Marlboro was started being cited as women's cigarette.

With this unintended impression, Marlboro immediately changed its letter type and started to use its famous masculine cowboy commercials. If this situation occurred in postmodernist era, most probably a majority of people would criticize Marlboro and stop buying, since Marlboro implicitly suggests that it does not give much value to its women customers. When considering all these, it can be clearly defended that due to the profound influence of postmodernism on marketing, a vast amount of companies have shifted from

forbids, mass consumption based approaches to post-forbids, individualistic based approaches.

To continue with the structure of organizations, it might be asserted that before the birth of the term " postmodernist' most of the companies had adopted the principles of forbids. Believing the quality of stability, homogeneity and control and they followed the rules of a masculine culture. Their organization structures were strictly hierarchical. Hence, there was a significant power distance among different levels of management. However, after postmodernism came to scene, the effectiveness of the bureaucratic organization culture during turbulent, unpredictable or complex times has been questioned.

Many new beneficial concepts such as employee empowerment, flat organization structure have been created and emphasized. Afterwards, organizational design becomes more flat, since it is widely believed that one of the most significant factors carrying a company to success is the active participation of employees. As the organization becomes more flat, the communication link among different levels of management gets stronger which contributes to the creation of new innovative ideas. Moreover, companies' culture has been changed dramatically with postmodernism.

During the ass, ass company environment was homogeneous, outer directed, and factory based, since at those times a majority of firms believed the strength of stability. On the other hand with the postmodernism, company environment has been shifted to heterogeneous, self centered and participatory business culture. The motivation behind this situation is that

companies have become to experience that creation of unique ideas in terms of production of goods or services is very much related with the diversity of employees. Within an organization where everybody has a different personality, preference, perception etc. It would be more likely to make production that fits customers well. Therefore, in today's world those who can manage disorder and variety more effectively have a better chance to serve well and make sufficient profit. To conclude, with the rise of postmodernist ideas, as Stephen (1992) put forward that firms have been forced to prefer disorder to order, surface to depth, past to present, present to future, heterogeneity to homogeneity, plurality to nonsense, differences to similarities, complexity to simplification, rhetoric to logic and individuality to universality.

All in all, the term "postmodern" has profoundly affected the discipline of marketing as it has a deep influence on almost all social and intellectual endeavors such as sociology, philosophy, politics, history, economics etc. With the rise of postmodern marketing, companies have started to give careful consideration not only to the customer differences but also to their own organizational and cultural structure. While constructing a more friendly and participatory organizational environment, companies have started to offer a variety of solutions and answers to the demand of different customer groups.