Chapter 5
From Consumer Research to Marketing Management: Conclusions and Implications

INTRODUCTION

Previous chapters have been concerned with consumer choice in ways which are directly relevant to commercial marketing research and management as well as to the establishment and progress of a body of scientific knowledge. ‘Consumer behaviour’ is no longer a series of actions executed by buyers: it is an emergent discipline with implications for marketing research, business management, consumer education and protection, home economics and a host of other professions and fields of study. It is too early to draw fast conclusions for each and every implicated field but it is certainly appropriate to indicate broadly the import of the argument which has been pursued as a basis from which consequences for marketing thought and practice may be drawn and assessed.

The author’s primary concern has been with the development of consumer behaviour as a discipline and as a resource upon which educationalists, researchers, managers and others might draw. Thus, the conclusions and implications discussed in this chapter initially concern the paradigm within which academic consumer researchers have conducted research and teaching. The subsequent discussion, the focus of which is consumer research, necessarily touches, however, upon both academic and commercial investigations of consumer choice, for each tends to rest upon the prevailing paradigm and any implications for that conceptual framework thus affect both theorists and practitioners. (Many consumer researchers have a foot in each camp, of course). The book cannot close at that point, however. Technologically based disciplines cannot advance unless they have strong links with practical concerns. It would be odd indeed if the paradigmatic questionings discussed in terms of pure and applied consumer research had no implications for marketing management.
An integral part of this chapter is devoted, therefore, to an exploratory account of the broad consequences of conceptual change for managerial action.

PARADIGMATIC IMPLICATIONS

DeFleur and Westie argue for the refinement of the concept of attitude by means of the elimination of an intervening or latent process variable and by the operational definition of attitude. An essential step, 'would be to link our definitions more firmly to the methods we employ in measurement.' They indicate the ramifications of this step quite clearly by pointing out that:

We must start with the concept of attitude defined as specified probabilities of a syndrome of responses and then carefully specify three things: (1) the exact 'social object' which presumably provides the stimulation for these responses, (2) the exact nature and number of different classes or dimensions of responses [i.e., verbal or overt], and (3) the exact measuring or observational operations employed to obtain a quantitative statement of an individual's response probability for each class of responses.

In large degree, their recommendations have been translated into action. The notion that 'true' attitudes are inner-state mechanisms, processes or hypothetical variables which mediate behaviour towards an object regardless of circumstance has been dealt a severe blow by the marshalling of empirical evidence to the contrary. The thoroughgoing recognition of the prior importance of situational factors in the prediction of consumer choice is consistent with abandonment of the latent process conception and the adoption of a more probabilistic, behavioural conception of attitude.

The steps taken to ensure correspondence between verbal, attitudinal responses and overt behaviour, especially by the measurement of both behaviours on identical psychometric scales, have, moreover, linked definitions of attitude undeniably closely with the techniques of measurement that have been applied. But the adoption, conscious or unconscious, of a notion of attitude that is closely identifiable with DeFleur and Westie's probability conception has more far reaching implications for marketing research and management than the redefini-