

## FOSTERING MARKETING STUDENTS' CREATIVITY: ARTS-BASED EDUCATION

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### Abstract

This study addresses a pedagogical experience of marketing students' creativity development by involving students in the applied arts-based creativity education course "Abstraction and reality". Titus (2007) Creative Marketing Breakthrough Model served as a theoretical framework for the course syllabus design. The course "Abstraction and reality" has been offered as an elective class to ISM University of Management and Economics (Lithuania) marketing students for 5 years. The students' responses indicate that the course stimulates their creative thinking skills. The pedagogical implications for successful implementation of this kind of course for marketing faculty are provided.

"In the Renaissance creativity might have been a luxury for the few but by now it is a necessity for all" (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi)

### Introduction

According to literature marketing education has much to learn from arts. Education based on arts can help students learn how to become more creative and innovative. "Companies are scouring the world for new ideas. In their quest for creativity, they surely have something to learn from the creative industries" (Schumpeter, 2011). Results of the first annual C-Factors Index (a global analysis of the impact of creativity on culture, communications and business) revealed "creativity as one of the most influential forces driving today's global economy".

Consequently, educators are focusing their attention on methods for developing creativity in their marketing students (Anderson, 2006; McIntyre, Hite & Rickard, 2003; Ramocki, 1994, 1996; Titus, 2000, 2007). The empirical research on marketing students' perceptions suggests that creativity is an important skill for marketing majors and one that can be learned (McCorkle, Payan, Reardon, & Kling, 2007). The professionals agree that market success requires companies to integrate creativity into their organizations (Christensen & Raynor, 2003; Coy, 2000; Hirshberg, 1998; Peters, 1997).

It is obvious, that if we want to find solutions in a world that is becoming increasingly complex, we cannot rely on traditional ways of teaching marketing. *New knowledge, technology and globalization have presented challenges to traditional marketing education. Educators have to rethink marketing teaching methods as despite the increasing importance of creativity in today's business environment; few frameworks have been presented in the marketing education literature. The purpose of this article was to introduce a pedagogical experience of marketing students' creativity development by involving students in the applied arts based creativity education course Abstraction and Reality at ISM University of Management and Economics, Lithuania.* The theoretical basis for the creativity framework is discussed along with its pedagogical implications for creativity education. Furthermore, the pedagogical implications for successful implementation of this kind of course for marketing faculty are provided.

### Literature Review

#### Defining Creativity

Creativity is considered the ultimate of human qualities, one of the key measures of intelligence that separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom (Goldenburg & Mazursky, 2002).

Creativity has been defined from different perspectives and more than 200 definitions of creativity in literature have been suggested (Weisberg, 1993; DasGupta, 1994). Taylor (1988) analyzed more than 50 definitions and categorized them into several classes (DasGupta, 1994):

1. Gestalt type: the major emphasis is on the recombination of ideas or the restructuring of a Gestalt.
2. End product oriented: according to which creativity is a process that results in a novel output or work or inventions.
3. Expressiveness related: the important factor is self-expression. Whenever one expresses oneself in a unique or individualistic way, one is considered as being creative.
4. Psychoanalytic: creativity is defined in terms of the interaction between the id, ego, and the superego.
5. Process oriented: the emphasis is on the thinking process itself. That is, a certain type of process is said to characterize creativity.

Although no universally agreed upon definition of creativity exists creativity is obviously complex phenomenon which first of all incorporates such entities as imagination, originality, and self-expression (Fryer & Collins, 1991). According to Parkhurst (1999) claims that the output of creativity is the ability to “develop novel solutions to problems” or develop “original and novel products”.

The theoretical assumption of creativity adopted in this article is consistent with *end product oriented approach* and adapts Robinson (2006) definition of creativity assumption: “creativity is the process of having original ideas that have value” encompassing the processes undertaken to produce creative marketing initiatives that are unique to the marketplace and create value for the customer.

### **The Importance of Creativity Development for Marketing Majors**

Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (Approved by the American Marketing Association, October 2007). Although it is agreed that creativity is a key success factor in business and management, educators devote little time and attention to developing it (Edwards, McGoldrick, & Oliver, 2006). On the one hand, educators have acknowledged the need for more innovative teaching methods to correspond the diverse learning styles of marketing students (Karns, 1993; Morrisson et al., 2003). The importance of creativity learning within the marketing discipline has been recognized by many scholars (Eriksson & Hauer, 2004; Gilbert, Preshaw, & Ivy, 1992; Hamel & Prahalad, 1991; Jacobs, 1984; Levitt, 1986; McIntyre et al., 2003; Ramocki, 1994, 1996; Titus, 2000). On the other hand, students are still taught how to answer questions and solve problems, but opportunities to develop creativity is very seldom provided.

The significance of creativity to business success has motivated researchers to focus on the exploration of the marketing and creativity relationship (Anderson, 2006; Eriksson & Hauer, 2004; Ramocki, 1994; Titus, 2000). Authors have empirically confirmed the efficacy of creativity training to marketing instruction (Anderson, 2006; Jacobs, 1984; Ramocki, 1996). The empirical research has proven creativity in marketing as a problem-solving activity involves the development of unique solutions to customer problems (Titus, 2000). In general, the research suggests that creativity is a “systematic, disciplined, and sustained cognitive effort of divergent thinking” (Eriksson & Hauer, 2004, p. 175). Still, although creativity has repeatedly been

recognized as critical to marketing success (Levitt, 1986), creativity instruction has not been introduced into marketing classrooms very often. In this article we present an example that demonstrates how creativity could be taught in marketing major classes.

### **Arts Based Marketing Education Framework**

The arts based marketing education framework discussed in this article is grounded on Titus (2007) *Creative Marketing Breakthrough Model*. Titus (2007) offered five framework dimensions as the basis for creativity teaching/learning in marketing: uncommon sense, uncertainty, knowledge, motivation, and cognitive flexibility.

1. *Uncommon sense*. Good marketing practice these days is characterized by *uncommon sense*: rare, unconventional, and extraordinary ideas and thinking lead to unique marketing solutions which may be an outstanding competitive advantage. Therefore an educator has to expose students to a rich supply of contrasting “conventional and unconventional” thinking modes. Exposing students to totally different perspectives tends to help students more fully appreciate the need to radical marketing thought, ideas, and approaches that frequently defy common sense and reason (Titus, 2007).
2. *Uncertainty*. One of the biggest challenges management educators are facing is how to persuade students that they cannot tackle recent complex marketing problems without finding a creative unique solution. Artists spend enormous amounts of personal effort without any assurance of achieving a creative breakthrough. Clearly, the same can be said of marketers striving to produce the next great marketing idea or breakthrough product (Titus, 2007). Traditionally students are taught “how to” solve a particular marketing problem and find „the correct answer“. Such thinking reflects the belief that there is a “single” best solution of the problem. Unfortunately, marketing problems do not typically avail themselves to formulaic solutions (Titus, 2007). Definitely educators cannot provide students with such answers as there hardly are any best answers that would fit any situation in any market. This is precisely why it is so important for marketing educators to ensure that students are fully aware of the ambiguity and uncertainty that surrounds marketing decision making (Titus, 2007).
3. *Motivation*. Failure is an inevitable part of the creative experience. It is obvious that marketers are very seldom successful creating great ideas in their first attempt. It may take many trials before the “eureka” moment arrives. Students are not generally aware of the high failure rates that accompany various marketing activities or exposed to circumstances that mimic such high degrees of personal failure (Titus, 2007). Students should experience the failure and how much of personal effort is necessary in order to produce breakthrough marketing ideas and initiatives. So how psychologically prepare students for the high degree of motivation required to consistently produce creative marketing breakthroughs?
4. *Knowledge*. Disciplinary knowledge provides the foundation for productive creative synthesis. Some of the most important creative breakthroughs in history have resulted from the synthesis of knowledge from two seemingly unrelated domains (Titus, 2007). “Consequently, marketing students must be convinced of the need to acquire knowledge from as many different domains as possible” (Titus, 2007, p.269). Unfortunately, marketing educators are overly focused on course content. Such an approach to teaching/learning is precisely the opposite of what the methods educators should adopt if they wish their students to improve their creativity. “When creatively solving difficult marketing problems, one can never be sure when some seemingly irrelevant idea will lead to a revolutionary new marketing breakthrough” (Titus, 2007, p.269). Marketing students should be learning as much as they can about everything they can because they are in the creativity business. Educators involved in marketing instruction should consider incorporating into a marketing curriculum disciplines that would suggest the need for increased opportunities for

marketing students to engage in interdisciplinary studies. „Marketing programs striving to improve student creative performance may want to seriously consider expanding their students' interdisciplinary learning options” (Titus, 2007, p. 269).

5. *Cognitive flexibility*. “...many creative marketing breakthroughs result from the generation of novel associations and relationships that ultimately lead to valuable marketing initiatives. Individuals adept at generating these novel relationships are believed to possess the ability to think in a cognitively flexible manner” (Titus, 2007, p.269). The ability to synthesize absolutely different concepts in order to form unique marketing ideas/solutions is vital skill for marketing professionals.

## **Experiential Creativity**

The course “*Abstraction and Reality*” was developed and offered as an elective course. The course syllabus is patterned after the *Creative Marketing Breakthrough Model* (Titus, 2007) and the five creative thinking dimensions.

*Uncommon sense*. The students of the course “*Abstraction and Reality*” are exposed to contrasting “conventional and unconventional” thinking modes through the analysis of art creation assumptions, structure, content and form. Students are acquainted with visual and reality driven perspectives. The comprehension of the subject matter through naming iconographic elements, e.g., historical event, allegory, mythology, etc. is a part of the course. The educators have found that students respond well when exposed to product histories that for the students when analyzing artwork seem to defy “common sense” and reason. For example the analysis of Marcus Harvey “Myra” fosters associations between reality inspired experience and new reality creation. The artist Marcus Harvey created a new visual reality by expressing Myra’s portrait with handprints taken from a plaster cast of a child’s hand (Myra was a serial killer of children). The portrait was shown in the *Sensation* exhibition at the Royal Academy of Art in 1997. The painting had to be temporarily removed from display for repair after it was attacked in two separate incidents on the opening day, in which ink and eggs were thrown at it. *The Times* newspaper’s art critic, Richard Cork, wrote that:

*Far from cynically exploiting her notoriety, Harvey's grave and monumental canvas succeeds in conveying the enormity of the crime she committed. Seen from afar, through several doorways, Hindley's face looms at us like an apparition. By the time we get close enough to realize that it is spattered with children's handprints, the sense of menace becomes overwhelming.*

This artwork analysis provides a great virtue of thought-provoking, complexity, and challenges of reality that leads to recognition of utopian potential - its ability to enrich existing reality while creating new one. This is directly tied to the ability to change, grow, and make oneself see unconventional perspectives. In showing how the artist worked in both historical and cultural terms, educator can develop students’ critical thinking skills.

Student reflections on this learning:

*“Imagination come, exploit and leave. That is the best novel.”* (M. Vaiciunaite, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student).

*“This course allows me to shout out loudly my feelings and hide them behind the historical reality because in marketing as well as in history everything goes in cycles which means that what I feel now has already been experienced. The totally new comprehension of the surrounding world helps me see the unseen”* (M. Kemzura, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student).

Artworks' analyses are focused on determining what the features suggest and deciding why the artist used such features to convey specific ideas. Why the artist used unconventional, sometimes very drastic way to express his thoughts? The analysis help students more fully appreciate the need to entertain radical marketing thought, ideas, and approach that frequently defy common sense and reason.

*Knowledge.* "Marketing educators involved in creativity instruction may consider intentionally assigning student readings from a wide variety of disciplines and challenge students to find the potential relevance of the material to marketing" (Titus, 2007). The course *Abstraction and Reality* provides for marketing students opportunity for interdisciplinary studies – art in this case. Requiring marketing students to possess some knowledge of art history allow them to contribute more fully to the design and development of customer products and services. The study of arts history and development from ancient to modern era, from Eastern to Western cultures provides students with the knowledge from a totally different but very rich field as art history studies covers a vast area. The course includes psychological, sociological, semiotic and historical approaches to art. Art forms are also in a state of constant flux and the boundaries between art fields can be blurred, posing new challenges for research. Studies of art emphasize work in a practical format that aims to connect the acquisition of knowledge to the production of knowledge. Students receive a well-organized, visually comprehensive overview of key art history phenomena, are exposed to a diversity of theoretical approaches, and encouraged to sharpen their critical and conceptual thinking skills.

Student reflections on this learning:

*"Antic, classicism, modernism, postmodernism, eastern and western art analysis provides me a splendid opportunity to understand content and form, energy and structure relationship continuum. The knowledge of art history and comprehension of totally different entity inspired many new ideas and opened up my mind. I started to feel what I have never ever felt before: that world is full of great things; you just have to be open to it, take it, and create yourself."* (R.Vonzodas, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student).

Clearly, the experience and students' feedback indicate that creativity is confined to interpretivist paradigm and awareness that there are multiple ways to understand the phenomenon. The assumptions arising from the experience teaching the course and interviews of the participants' allow us to make conclusion that art-based learning breeds connections and creative transfers across fields.

*Uncertainty.* One very effective method of exposing students to the ever present uncertainties that accompany creative marketing is to require students to create an art piece. After students have studied artworks and art history they are supposed to decide on what art work they could produce by themselves. They are provided with all the necessary resources: canvas, paints, clay, metal, paper, etc. It is up to them to decide which type or method would fulfill their expectation. Students have to go through the journey of their own discoveries towards the answer. Often students find themselves stuck or at a loss regarding how to proceed to resolve what idea they want to materialize and how to express the idea: using paints and canvas, clay, paper, cloth, etc.

Student reflections on this learning:

*"I was so full of new knowledge and new understanding; I felt I want to express myself, my feelings. I wanted to tell the world what I see, I wanted to create that new understanding"*. (P. Toleikis, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student).

*“I was scared when I was standing in front of a white canvas. It is so clean and I was so full of ideas. How to make all this ideas complement each other, how to better express them, what colors to use?” (L.Jankauskas, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student).*

*“After the first brushes, I was lost. I did not know if my idea is OK. So, I went home and started reading books. In few days I was again here standing and going through new discoveries. It happened many times; eventually I was more than shocked by the result: it cannot be me who created this. It is perfect. I liked it a lot.” (T.Kmieliauskaite, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student).*

Students' imagination was released; they felt that they have so much to say, so much to create. Such creativity dimensions as openness to experience and risk taking are the indicators of creativity. Certainly, uncertainty seems to be a major aspect of divergent thinking skill, important during the initial stages of creating process. These students' reflections show an overall effect that the learning of relating arts techniques to aspects of the creativity is working.

*Cognitive flexibility.* Very often we may find ourselves unable to break free from established patterns of thought. How to think in unconventional way? How to break free from established patterns of thought? The study of art provides opportunity to produce novel associations and relationships leading to unique ideas. Without the totally different knowledge this is not possible.

The synthesis of “irrelevant” concepts may result into an original innovative solution or perspective. This course enables students to have resources for this unconventional synthesis which is reflected in their piece of art.

Student reflections on this learning:

*“It was absolutely astonishing to realize how many new perspectives and comprehension I experienced during this course. The knowledge which seemed to me irrelevant in the beginning occurred to be the most fruitful as it produced in my mind totally new associations and ideas.” (V.Stankaitis, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student)*

*“I wanted to try something different, something unusual. I expected that I will be enriched with new vision of the common reality. And it happened, I learned to relate and see more. I was full of new visions.” (M. Zitkus, 1<sup>st</sup> year student).*

Multiple mind frames allow us to make our knowledge become creatively useful. Interdisciplinary teaching helps to avoid statically contained thinking within single frame and boosts the thinking across a variety of applications of the acquired knowledge. Thus, “marketing curriculum must be opened to the flavour and reinforcement of creative inquiry, which should result in a vast expansion in the types of products sought from students” (Perkins, 1984).

*Motivation.* Eventually, it is not that easy to enter the world of unknown (art world) and even more difficult to build self-motivation and psychologically prepare students for the high degree of motivation required to consistently produce a piece of art. Students need to appreciate the motivational demands of good marketing practice as it is inseparable of failures, educators in their turn should be mindful of the impact that intrinsic motivation has on creative performance. The students' experience of the creative process from idea to implementation requires a strong motivation as the final result not always is a satisfactory one.

A well-equipped art studio in ISM University of Management and Economics was designed to create a supportive environment to stimulate students' willingness to try innovative experience, enter the sea of unknown. In order to minimize confusion and boost motivation educators plays a vital role: they should provide encouraging support to promote creativity. E. Brazauskas, an

artist and educator of the course, has succeeded to develop creativity and unleash the hidden potential of our students’.

Student reflections on this learning:

*“It takes courage to enter the world of unknown and if no support is provided you may run away very soon. It was so necessary to be surrounded my supportive environment and encouragement. I experienced moments when I wanted to leave the course but the instructor was able to make me believe that I can do it. And I did.”* (M.Goncaraite, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student)

*“I do not think that it usual for business schools to have their art studio. Our school has a very good art studio. We are proud of it as well as we are proud to have this splendid opportunity to learn art and creation. So many students from other schools envy us”* (G.Varaniute, 1<sup>st</sup> year student)

### Conclusion

Substantial evidence suggests that creativity has become one of a critical resource of organizations’ competitive advantage these days. Creativity is the most critical contribution to turbulent knowledge-based business environment (Brabbs, 2001). Clearly businesses need creatively thinking marketing students, future employees. Thus, the concern for developing creativity in the marketing classroom has been stressed by many marketing educators (Davis, 2013; Joo, McLean & Yang, 2013; Loewengerger, 2013, McCorkle et al., 2007; Ramocki, 1994, 1996; Shipp, Lamb & Mokwa, 1993).

Creative thinking is the search for patterns, relationships, and perspectives between what is known for an individual. Thus, the more diverse the knowledge is possessed by an individual the more unique synthesis is possible. *The purpose of this article was to introduce a pedagogical experience of marketing students’ creativity development by using the applied arts based creativity education course Abstraction and Reality based on Creative Marketing Breakthrough Model. The course Abstraction and Reality has been offered as an elective module to ISM University of Management and Economics (Lithuania) students. The experience of five years allows us to provide the following tactical tips for successful implementation of this kind of course:*

1. Offer supportive environment where creativity is accepted;
2. Emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation and the intention to create;
3. Provide substantial amount of diverse knowledge;
4. Create environment for cognitive flexibility;
5. Stress avoidance of uncertainty and uncommon sense;
6. Encourage involvement in open-ended projects;
7. Instill appreciation of creative process, not just the result;
8. Encourage projects were real risk exists regarding successful accomplishment.

Marketing educators have evolved curriculums dramatically in recent years (Ferrell & Hartline, 2011). However, results reveal that significant room for improvement exists (Finch, Nadeau & O'Reilly, 2012). The authors of this paper have displayed their experience of developing marketing students’ creativity by the example presented in the context of specific art-based course content across core disciplines of marketing. Hopefully, this experience will inspire other marketing educators to focus more on marketing students’ creativity development as creativity these days is not a luxury - it is a necessity.

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