

Teaching Marketing As A Science Or An Art?: An Exploratory Study Of Stakeholders Discourses

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Extended Abstract

Since the beginning of the history of human societies, it has been a question of understanding and anticipating the needs of one's loved ones, of one's community, of one's clients and of responding to them with relevance. As long as men have made exchanges, he has been a subject of marketing, that is to say, to find a way to achieve the most profitable exchange for the various parties involved. The name of this skill (or discipline depending on the time) and its definition, however, appeared only very late and have changed significantly over time (Alain & Philippe, 2006). Even today its definition does not seem obvious for students or even professionals. More surprisingly, its definition remains an object of debate among researchers (Baker & Saren, 2016; Brown, 1996).

Marketing, unlike the emerging social sciences, did not, however, benefit from the same credit or enthusiasm on the part of the scientific community. Marketing was indeed strongly related to the business world and to sales and was rather a branch of the economy from a historical point of view (Baker & Saren, 2016). Marketing researchers have had to prove the utility, seriousness and potential of the discipline very early on. For this, the solution chosen by the researchers was to affirm that marketing was a science like any other, able to create knowledge, to follow rigorous methods to predict and understand phenomena. Thus begins a debate that took place through interposed research articles in several academic journals for several decades. A first group advocated that marketing should be conceived and practiced as a science, while a second stream proposed to consider marketing as an art (Brown, 1996).

The growing uberisation of the market and the advent of digital technology increased the need for practitioners as well as researchers and students to propose models, designs and methods for thriving with the ongoing technological disruption (Darpy & Guillard, 2016). Computer science began to take precedence over the marketing discipline and we begin to observe in the professional practice a "left brained mindset" over-focusing on the development of algorithms, marketing management tools based on an engineering approach with very scattered practices depending on the sector, the technology and the objectives (Darpy & Guillard, 2016). Technology became a factor accelerating this scattering of practices, to illustrate this point the consultancy firm ChiefMartec produces every year a technology landscape for marketing identifying solutions and technologies used. The number of solutions identified by this company went from 150 to more than 5000 in 2017 which jeopardize the standards in the market and make the expertise and prediction very difficult for managers. On the other hand, the world of research and education is mobilizing models based on consumer psychology, cognition and emotion with the hope of identifying rules, clear patterns, stable structures that can last over time. Academic activity suffers also from a hyper fragmentation of research and shares this common issue with the professional practices. Hence, we find ourselves at the crossroads of a market characterized by celerity with some "chaotic random" development, and an academic cycle that follows a slower pace required by the methodological rigor and the academic canons and which is still struggling to identify an integrating framework capable of framing the marketing activity and that could serve as a common theoretical foundation for the discipline (Baker & Saren, 2016).

To complement these changes, researchers as well as practitioners have to revisit the central debate of "Marketing: Science or Art? In the light of current discourses and practices. This question asked by professor Converse more than 50 years ago has the merit of being still relevant (Brown, 1996). In fact, the ability to follow the behavior of an online consumer in real time, as well as his interactions, and to model these elements make it possible to consider a reading from the scientific angle. On the other hand, testing different "recipes" in companies as recommended by Davenport without being certain of the result by mobilizing different technologies and tactics to seduce the consumer is more a creative logic not to say artistic that mobilizes another mode of thought (Davenport, 2009). We suggest in this chapter to revisit these questions and focus on the literature retracing the evolution of the "Marketing: Art or Science" debate in order to identify its mutations and evolutions, and then enrich this historical retrospective with a study of the discourses and perceptions of the stakeholders linked to this debate.

We propose in this work to compare the discourses, as well as the perception of three categories of stakeholders concerned by this question: students, teachers and doctoral students in marketing, as well as professionals in activity. We conducted for that a series of 14 qualitative interviews with participants from Canada, France, England and China aged between 21 and 45 years old. The verbatim was transcribed and a content analysis and a lexicometric analysis were conducted to relate the different conceptions and discourses of marketing that exist today among these stakeholders and the key trends that ensue for the future of marketing (Alain & Philippe, 2006; Bardin, 2001).

The results indicate 9 key themes that characterize the current debate on marketing as a practice and discourse. Among these themes, we cite as an example (1) the pressing need to reposition the image of marketing to counter the stereotypes linked to the excesses of the consumer society. (2) The imperative demand of professionals as well as marketing students of a normative repository like the one practiced in finance, in quality management, or the project management body of knowledge (PMBOK) to better guide the reflection and the marketing execution process. (3) The establishment of new bonds between research, teaching and the practice of marketing, particularly via new emerging technologies such as the "open data" to provide cross-views and active collaborations on present market issues.

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