

PERCEPTION OF DIGITAL MARKETING: ART OR SCIENCE?

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Vnímanie digitálneho marketingu: Umenie alebo veda?

***Abstract:** Marketing as a discipline has evolved to a current stage through five eras which cover more than one hundred years. During the years ICT and technologies have rapidly improved and marketing as a very dynamic discipline has successfully adapted most of them at least in some form. While marketing without modern ICT could have been perceived as an art, advanced technologies might shift the perception more to a science. The internet as already a well-established environment for modern marketing strategies offers data collection and procession, which in almost every case triggers marketing strategy decision-making process. The main aim of this article is to identify, whether digital marketers, who are the most affected subject by the rise of advanced technologies, perceive the marketing discipline more as an art or as a science. Quantitative research in form of online interviewing was used as the main research method. The results of the research offers digital marketers' point of view of the researched issue and suggests, whether modern marketing is more art or science.*

Keywords: digital marketing, data collection, creativity

JEL Classification: M15, M31, M37

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1 Introduction

In some point of view marketing might be perceived as a strategic approach, which is as old as civilization itself. Since the first tribes were formed, individuals were focusing on satisfying their needs and those of their relatives. Thus, they used approaches, by which they persuaded other members of the tribe to act as required for self-welfare (Starcevic, 2015). However, a full potential of marketing was unveiled after industrialization boom when outcomes of massive production surpassed the demand of customers. People were not dependent on the offer of one or few companies anymore but in a relatively short time; they began to have a vast scale of product options through several companies. Production companies and sellers were forced to fight for their customers. This was the point when marketing unveiled its full potential. Competition in all industries began to be so significant that even specialized marketing subcategories were developed. For instance, manufacturers with product offer within supermarkets utilize shopper marketing strategies to get their products to a better place in shelves within a customer field of vision, etc. (Lamey et al., 2018). Hunt's (2018) extensive research of historical sources unveils five eras for marketing formation:

1) Era 1 – an academic marketing discipline was found and a strategic marketing had the main role in formation of the discipline (1900 – 1920).

2) Era 2 – marketing existed, however it was neglected, overlooked and because of the lack of competition, firms were not forced to utilize marketing activities (1920 – 1950).

3) Era 3 – the importance of marketing grew, it rose to prominence (1950 – 1980);

4) Era 4 – a marketing area became a fragment; companies formed marketing departments dedicated to market research and analyses (1980 – present);

5) Era 5 – marketing has a significant relevance in a strategy of all firms and has promising prospects to the future (present – future).

The five eras of the current marketing evolution cover more than one hundred years. The richest hundred years in terms of technological development and ICT adaptation, are currently utilized in almost every area of marketing.

However, the level of technological progress in particular decades did not always allow utilization in marketing. According to Kumar (2015) marketing discipline adopted a resource-conscious view between 1996 and 2004, when a significant change came by data storage and data based empirical studies. The internet represents an ideal environment for such approach because it allows data collection about individuals and via extensive analyses, with utilization of analytical tools; it offers conclusions, which triggers a business decision making process. Bilby and Parker (2017) determined in their research how the global industry is changing in response to the digital era. They stated that digital environment represents a completely new way of how marketing strategies are being implemented.

1.1 Micro and macro-economic perception of ICT

From microeconomic point of view, the present marketing strategies based on ICT belong to the most important approaches which drive sales. According to a recent property market research, it is possible to assume that online sales and prices predictions can predict real market transaction prices, where the product quality plays just a minor role (Lee and Sasaki, 2018). Thus, even perfect product does not secure sales and revenues for a company.

From macroeconomic point of view, Dubova (2019) in her research concluded that “one of the reasons for the low effectiveness of marketing activities in some regions is an insufficient attention to the institute of ICT, which is a popular tool for optimization of modern socio-economic phenomena and processes in the conditions of creation of information economy”. So how do the advanced digital technologies and adaptation of ICT shape marketing approaches and how does it change the perception of the marketing discipline?

1.2 Marketing: art or science?

The author Converse (1945) precariously named the marketing discipline as “science or art of marketing” in his research. In the introduction he stated that marketing has developed from the fields of economics, scientific management, psychology, and accounting. Work in every each the disciplines mentioned demands some amount of creativity, opinions, mathematics, statistics, etc. In other words, it involves some amount of an art but also of a science. Before the rise of ICT marketing demanded a significantly larger proportion of creativity, because the market missed technologies, which provided data

for a more scientific decision making process. Thus, developed and executed marketing campaigns were based on creativity, assumptions and personal conviction of individuals or groups. Inputs into marketing strategy were created by emotions, feelings and personal tastes. In a mixture of several disciplines, which all together create the marketing discipline, a significant role is played by psychology. The understanding of what people think, feel and perceive leads marketers to predictions of what they might do, buy or appreciate from a brand site. Development of person is a widely utilized technique used to create a perfect customer. By creating persons marketers name their target groups, squeeze it mostly into one, two or three imaginary persons, which have names, ages, professions, predilections, and even describe things they are afraid of and also the things they are enthusiastic about (Dion and Arnould, 2016). The marketing approach like this cannot be categorized as a science, because for the person creation marketers utilize assumptions and personal preferences (Faeth, 2014). Except for subjective techniques utilized in the marketing strategy preparation, the marketing discipline is closely connected to a brand. One of the biggest expectations from marketing is to create or co-create a recognizable brand, which will differ from a competition and will reach a preferred target group. However, brand and its perception is a subjective feeling and different people might perceive the same brand in completely different ways (Kennedy and Guzmán, 2016). Also, a long-term process of the brand creation is mostly lead by a marketer or a group of marketers, who have different personalities, preferences, assumptions and their own perception of the world. The Coca-Cola company might be, despite of all the marketing effort, perceived by one customer as a family brand because of the ads with the beverage on a lunch table and by other as a brand for youngsters because of the ads displaying young people enjoying life (Mundra, Gulati and Gupta, 2012).

Even an art work and creative decisions are often based on data and comprehensive researches. Roth (2013) stated about marketers in his research: *“you are an artist and you rely on the right tools and skills to create a piece that reflects your core and generates interest. By focusing on your marketing message and how it is communicated to your community and within your organization, you will be able to build a foundation that will lead you to success both now and in the future.”* The term “right tools” might be translated into marketing analyses and analytical tools, which are able to collect and process input data into precious marketing information. This is where the science takes place in the marketing.

According to Webster (2005), the third and fourth eras were crucial for marketing, because it shifted from the managerial and creative focus to the analytical one. The author also stated that there are two focuses, which do not need to be, no matter how frequently they occur in competition. It is in particular the fourth era that is also connected to the arrival of the internet and subsequently its continual spread. The Internet is the environment, where a lot of marketers turned their focus because of a concentration of the required target groups. The internet and relevant ICT offer accessible data mining, which serves as an important marketing decision-making input. Marketing has always been about measuring its results. All companies need to know whether financial sources devoted to marketing activities have brought required results. That is, whether the investment into communication directed to target groups returned in higher revenues. Measurements and extensive analyses are easier in the era of the internet than ever. Modern marketing measures everything, including the number of people reading a message, the amount of people a campaign converts to buyers, the amount of money a campaign spends, or the amount of people buying again. All of these are mathematical questions and answers and are important for the success of the marketing strategy. Math and accounting are important sciences to the current business (Torok, 2018).

In current technological era, where almost every marketing decision is based on some data from marketing analyses and analytical tools, marketers are still perceived by some as artists. However, with the rise of the internet, ICT and advanced marketing analyses and analytical tools, which allowed data collection, procession and databased decision making, the question is, how much marketing shifted from the art to the science, and how it is currently viewed by marketers and involved community. The problem of identification of the marketing discipline as science or as art persisted until today. At the time when the ownership of the advanced analytical tools working on the base of artificial intelligence and machine learning is a matter of social influence, it is questionable (Björn, 2018) what influence advanced ICT and digitation has on the perception of the marketing discipline by digital marketing specialists.

The issue of art and science in the digital marketing processes was and still is examined by various authors. A pilot study and two experiments demonstrate that the presence of visual art favourably influences brand image perceptions and enhances perceptions of category (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2008). The study declares that art is an important part of digital marketing processes and final shape of advertisement. Advertising, the graphic arts, industries and the inno-

vative procedures (used by all the areas mentioned) were put together in the late nineteenth century coinciding with the aesthetic and technical revolution (Tena Parera, 2019). The progress in understanding the art of management and the science of communications measurement are continually examined (Cornwell, 2008) and a relationship between them is still an issue of researches. The issue is also present in market research. Dynamic data can be interpreted in various ways; machines are not able to interpret and visualize every information as it was declared in a conducted research (Bartram, 2005). Also older researches deal with the issue. According to Supran (1992), the question of presence of art and science in marketing strategy is crucial also during launching new products onto the market. The right balance between the two has a potential to create product winners on the market. According to Fuguitt (2015), it is important to create space for the meeting of art and science in marketing processes and to find equilibrium for them to secure that none of them dominates the process.

2 Aim and methodology

While marketing approaches in the previous millennium were considered more as art, utilization of the internet in current marketing approaches has led to the fusion of the art with ICT, which has the base in marketing analyses and advanced analytical tools. The main aim of this paper is to identify whether digital marketers, who are most affected by the rise of ICT, consider the marketing discipline more as art or as science.

Three sub-goals paved the way for the fulfilment of the main aim:

- 1) The identification of share of analytical and creative approaches in the process of marketing strategy development;
- 2) the identification of the share of art and science in usual daily executive agenda of digital marketers;
- 3) the quantification of the share of intellectual activities and analytics in digital marketing processes.

Research of local and foreign literature and internet sources helped to understand perception of marketing during previous and current millennia and how the internet influenced the rise of ICT in marketing. The theoretical framework

section of the article was edited and finalized in Australia after the ANZMAC 2018 conference. Researches, thoughts and opinions on the topic presented at the conference enriched the theoretical part of the paper and contributed to the authors' current knowledge and opinion on the topic.

The main research method of the article was a quantitative research, which was conducted via the questionnaire created in Google Forms and delivered through various online channels with a high concentration of digital marketers, who were the main target group of the questionnaire. Data were collected through Slovak online channels, thus results of the paper are applicable on the Slovak market. Online channels utilized for the research were:

- A direct-mail – firm IAB Slovakia represents a regulation institution for digital marketing and advertisement on the Slovak market. The firm has at its disposal 163 e-mail addresses of people who requested membership in the newsletter list. The questionnaire was part of one of the newsletters, and it was sent to all 163 e-mail addresses. The questionnaire was placed at a very bottom of the newsletter. An estimated reach of the questionnaire calculated based on a personal newsletter consumption of the authors was 65 people.

- A post on the firm's Facebook profile – a local digital marketing agency owns a Facebook group called "Digital Blog" with 2867 fans at the time of the research implementation. Reach of the published Facebook post was strictly organic without a paid support. A general organic reach, due to Facebook latest report, represents 4% of a fan database. The post might reach 114 fans of the Facebook group.

- A post on a personal Facebook profile – a local digital marketing influencer published a Facebook post with the questionnaire on his personal Facebook profile, which had 1388 friends at the time of the research implementation. Due to mentioned organic reach the post might reach 56 people.

- A Facebook post in a digital marketers' Facebook group – the post with the questionnaire was published in a Facebook group called "Marketers, copywriters, SEO optimizations". The post was published from the personal Facebook profile of one of the authors of the article. At the time of the research realization the group had 13,846 followers. A potential organic reach was 553 people.

The total potential organic reach of all of the utilized distribution channels was 788 people (overlap or duplication between the channels is not considered). The authors received 58 completed questionnaires. At the time of the research

35% of respondents worked in marketing agency, 12% in online media, 50% for a brand, 2% as freelancer and 2% as copywriter. An estimated return of completed questionnaires represents 7%. Several online channels were used at the same time, thus it was impossible to evaluate which online channel performed the best. However, the number of the answers increased most significantly after placing the questionnaire as a Facebook post in a digital marketing Facebook group. The questionnaire contained 15 questions. This paper processes only part of the questions and the received answers. The rest of the data was or will be processed in other articles or publications.

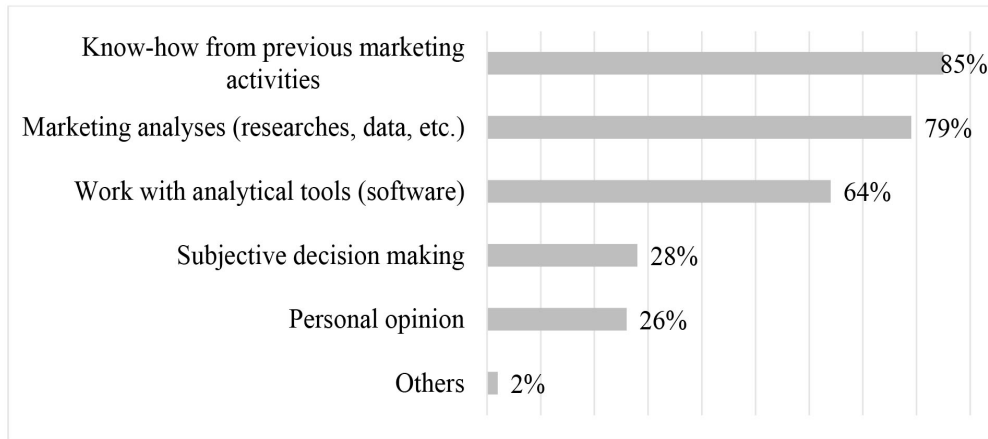
3 Research

Rise of the internet, digitalization and ICT had and still have a significant influence on the perception of marketing discipline as art or as science. The main goal of the conducted survey was to identify how the marketing discipline is perceived by digital marketers. Easily accessible data in the digital environment they are working in have a potential to persuade digital marketers it is more of a science.

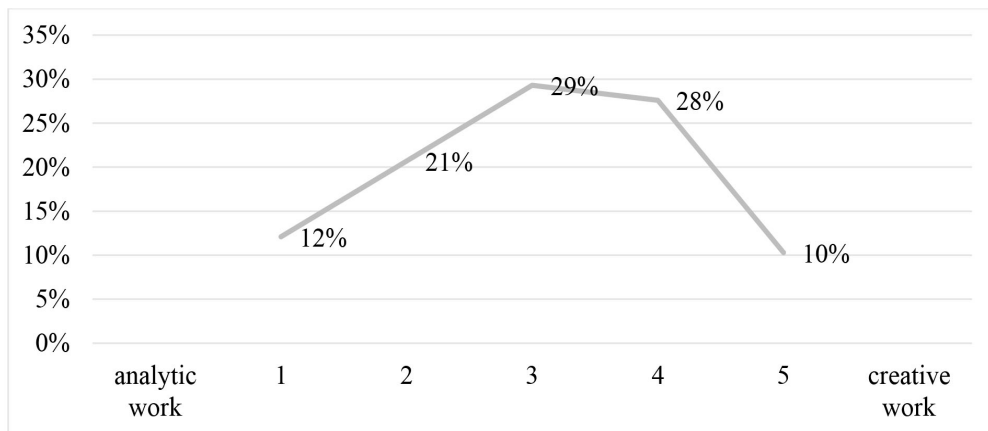
The first question of the research evaluated in this paper asked which of the following factors influences respondents during the creation of a digital marketing strategy the most. The respondents could mark multiple answers.

The most frequent answers were know-how, marketing analyses and analytical tools. All of the most frequent answers can be assigned to a science. Know-how is created by information and data generated in previous marketing strategies, thus the knowledge is basically databased. Marketing analyses and analytical tools options can also be assigned to the science, because of its databased character. Both of them need some amount of data to be utilized properly. Subjective decision making and personal opinion options, which might be assigned more to the art, were marked only by 27% of the respondents on average. Answers received to the first evaluated question indicate that digital marketers from their scope of work point of view perceive marketing discipline more as a science

The second question of the research asked the respondents whether the irregular scope of work contains more analytic or more creative work. The respondents could choose only one answer.

Figure 1: Decision-making factors in a digital marketing strategy process

Source: authors' research

Figure 2: The type of work to which digital marketers dedicate more time to during a usual workday

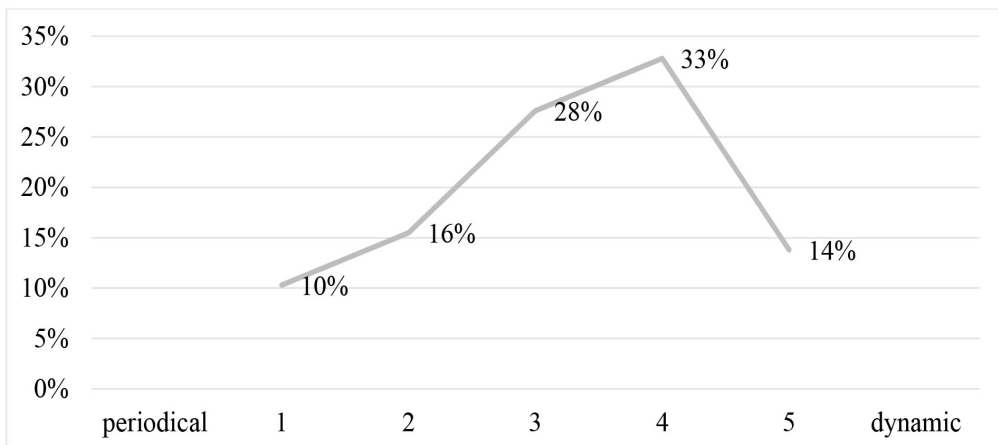
Source: authors' research

Since evaluation of the first question indicates that marketing discipline is perceived more as a science a logical assumption in evaluation of the second question would be that digital marketers dedicate more of their worktime to analytic work. 33% of the respondents incline more to an analytic work` 38% respondents incline more to a creative work, and 28% of them declared their

scope of work is right in the middle between the analytic and the creative work. The evaluation of the question turns the perception of the marketing discipline more to an art, however not solely. The digital marketing is a highly diverse area, thus the usual scope of work covers both, analytic and creative activities.

The third question researched whether the usual character of respondents' work is more periodical or dynamic. The respondents could mark only one option.

Figure 3: Character of work that digital marketers perform during their usual workday

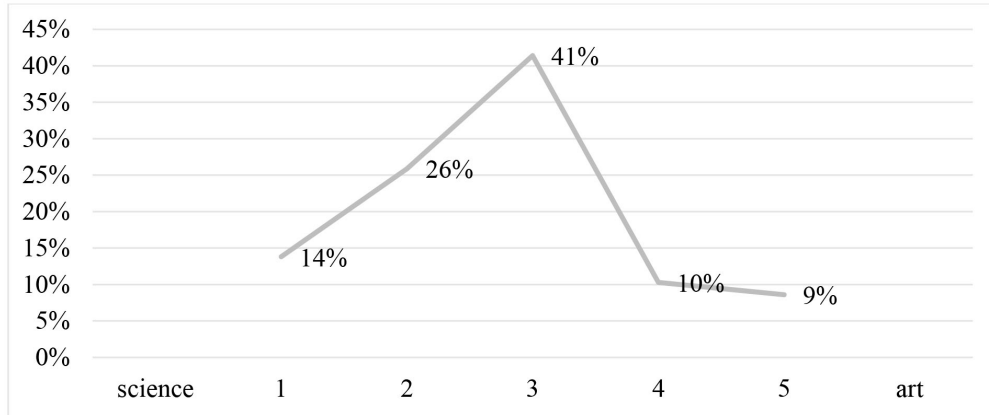


Source: authors' research

A periodical agenda has a tendency to be automated by analytical tools and more inclines to science. A dynamic scope of work is not so easily automatable and requires creative inputs; thus it inclines more to a science. 26% of the respondents declared that a character of their work was periodical; 47% declared it was more dynamic and 28% marked the middle option. The evaluation of the third question processed in the paper suggests that the marketing discipline is perceived by digital marketers more as an art than a science.

The fourth question directly asked the respondents whether they perceived digital marketing more as a science or as an art. It was possible to mark only one answer.

Figure 4: Digital marketers' perception of the current digital marketing approaches



Source: authors' research

The evaluation disclosed that only 19% of the marketers perceived marketing as an art` 40% considered marketing more as a science, and 41% balanced between the two. With regard to the evaluation of the previous questions, results were unexpected. There was a higher number of marketers who perceived the marketing discipline more as a science than as an art.

4 Conclusions and policy implications

The marketing discipline evolves, inherently adapts new ICT and naturally spreads to environments with a high concentration of potential customers. Transformation of the marketing naturally influences its perception by professionally involved people but also by the general public, which is affected by marketing approaches the most. While in previous millennium marketing was considered more as an art, because of the lack of the advanced technologies, development and adaptation of new ICT has a potential to shift the current perception more to a science.

The main aim of the paper was to determine whether digital marketers, who are most affected by the rise of ICT, consider the marketing discipline more as an art or as a science. The first step for achievement of declared aim was the identification of share of art and science in the process of digital marketing strategy development. The research has shown that most of the respondents

utilize marketing analyses and analytical tools during a development process. A marketing strategy decision-making process is triggered by creative activities only occasionally, even though the creative activities are almost always based on some analyses generated by analytical tools or on the base of know-how achieved from results from previous marketing activities. Thus, analytics and databased approaches create a substantial part of the digital marketing process. The second step of the research has brought a discovery that digital marketers devote more of their worktime to the creative work and their scope of work is more dynamic than periodical. The science perception is closely connected to the data and to a process automation. Data and automation lead to the development and the implementation of an advanced software, which can utilize artificial intelligence and machine learning approaches, and they also have a potential to substitute some of periodical and executive agenda of marketers. The whole process avoids dynamic and creative factors, which are difficult to predict. Achievement of the second sub-goal indicates that digital marketers perceive the marketing discipline more as an art, because of the prevalence of a creative and dynamic work in their daily agenda. The third step of the research conducted for the achievement of the third sub-goal asked digital marketers directly whether they considered the marketing discipline in the current evolution stage more as an art or as a science. Most of them declared it as a science, however, not solely. A lot of them balanced it between the two.

Marketing is an old discipline with a rich history. It spreads to new environments and utilizes new technical possibilities on the markets. The internet, as one of the biggest phenomena from the previous century serves as an ideal place for modern marketing strategies. Digital marketers utilize in their marketing processes data and a vast scale of information generated by advanced ICT. Gathered information serves as a crucial trigger in a decision-making process within the process of marketing strategy creation. Even when digital marketers utilize creative and dynamic approaches for marketing strategy development, their subjective outputs are based on marketing analyses and analytical tools. Modern marketing in all areas undoubtedly combines art and science. However, perception and regular executive agenda of digital marketers make the marketing in the online environment more science than art.

Further research might focus on the perception of the marketing discipline by different target groups. Examination of general marketers, marketing pedagogues and general public might enrich the research, bring new points of

view on the issue, contribute to understanding how the marketing discipline evolved in time and how it is perceived by people who are most affected by it.

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