

Chapter 11

From Courtship to Marriage in Marketing

Roxana Ciolăneanu

Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this chapter is to look at the concept of marketing from an integrative perspective, arguing for the complexity of the marketing philosophy and practices from linguistic, psychological and social points of view. Revisiting the concept of metaphor as a cognitive instrument will provide new insights into how it is employed and functions in marketing. Looking at the society's evolution and the importance it gives to the individual will contribute to understanding the changes in the way marketing is conceptualized and will help the author formulate some cognitive and linguistic consequences of these changes.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a long going debate about the scientific status of marketing that started in the late 1940s (Anderson, 1994; Carley & Taschchian, 2015) and has accompanied its evolution ever since, always gliding on the art-science continuum (Maclaran, Saren, Stern, & Tadajewski, 2010). The complexity of the issue and the heterogeneity of the opinions related to this state of affairs are justified by the fact that a marketing unifying theoretical framework would have to cover and integrate as many and diverse marketing functions as brand/product management, customer relationship management, advertising/promotion, pricing, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, distribution, marketing research, and new product/marketing development (Venkatesh & Peñaloza, 2006). Given the natural difficulty of identifying such a comprehensive theoretical perspective, a “multiparadigmatic approach” able to account for marketing as a “multi-layered and pluralistic field” (Möler, Pels, & Saren, 2010, p. 167) has been considered a better framework.

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The debate seems to have moved into the direction of admitting the existence of two branches: the scientific study of marketing processes and applied marketing (Bartels, 1983, quoted in Carley & Tashchian, 2015). There are authors who have argued that marketing could never be a science given its applied nature and authors who have demonstrated that it qualifies as a science if the right criteria are applied. Shelby Hunt, for instance, discriminates between positive marketing and normative marketing in her three dichotomies model and concludes that at least the positive dimension qualifies as science (Hunt, 2002). Other specialists have claimed that marketing is often seen as a confusing phenomenon because two different yet related areas are combined: its philosophic nature, that is, “a basic way of thinking about business that focuses on customers” and its applied nature, that is, “a functional area of management that uses a set of techniques” (Lancaster, & Reynolds, 2005, p. 15). In line with this distinction, the core of marketing philosophy is thinking about the customer. Therefore, in order to acquire long-term success, a company/organization needs a determined leader, able to “produce eager followers in vast numbers” who, in business, are the customers (Levitt, 1960, p. 56). In other words, the respective company is no longer viewed as producing products, but as providing “customer-creating value satisfactions” (Levitt, 1960, p. 56).

There are theoreticians who assign the marketing science an integrative dimension and claim that it “has a rich history of modelling marketing phenomena using the disciplines of economics, statistics, operations research, and other related fields” (Neslin & Winer, 2015, p. 1). Others (Carley & Taschchain, 2015) look at marketing from a sociological perspective and analyze its scientific status by applying the 5 criteria of Merton’s scientific ethos model: organized skepticism, ethical neutrality, universalism, disinterestedness and communality. Although no scientist or scientific discipline responds positively to all these criteria (the system is considered overly idealistic), marketing, according to the authors of the study, seems to perform relatively well only as far as organized skepticism is concerned, lagging more or less in terms of the other mentioned criteria.

This study draws on current theories in cognitive metaphor which advertise that “...metaphor in language is derived from metaphor in thought...” (Steen, 2007, p. 31). One of the fundamental assumptions of these theories is that “...most ideas and observations are constructs, arising out of our experience (...) with our environment.” (Steen, 2007, pp. 60-61). Moreover, metaphors are predominant not only in the way we speak, but also in the way we think and act. This is why, our conceptual system is “fundamentally metaphorical in nature” and, as a result, the metaphor is the cognitive instrument that helps us understand and experience “one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 5) and “one of the chief ways by which language evolves” (MacCormac, 1971(a), p. 249). Metaphors are also called “mind stretchers that help us broaden and lateralize our thinking” (van den Bulte, 1994, p. 408).

The purpose of this chapter is to give an account of the constitutive and suggestive power of metaphor in marketing. After reviewing some important literature about metaphors in language and metaphors in marketing, the chapter: (1) analyses some frequently mentioned metaphors in marketing; (2) explains the various roles that metaphors play in the marketing theory and marketing applications; (3) discriminates between metaphors as informative and formative instruments and metaphors as persuasive and manipulative instruments and; (4) shows that the two categories influence each other and are influenced by the evolution of the society. The fundamental role played by metaphors in structuring the marketing scientific theory and practice is reinforced in the concluding part.

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