

WHAT DO COMPANIES DO WHEN THEY DO MARKETING? A CLUSTER ANALYSIS

Work-in-progress paper

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Abstract

Purpose of the paper and literature addressed:

Our work-in-progress paper builds on literature discussing which activities can be considered as marketing activities. Its purpose is to identify to what extent companies have a homogeneous view of marketing activities or whether there is variance in their interpretations of the area.

Research method:

We use cluster analysis to examine a sample of 203 companies and to verify the level of homogeneity or heterogeneity in companies' interpretation of marketing activities.

Research findings:

Our cluster analysis permits identifying three large clusters of marketing activity perspectives.

Main contribution:

Our research allows documenting the level of variance in companies' interpretation of marketing. It has implications for marketing research as well as for marketing practice.

Keywords:

Marketing activities, marketing organization, cluster analysis

WHAT DO COMPANIES DO WHEN THEY DO MARKETING?

A CLUSTER ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Organizational issues in business-to-business marketing receive increasing attention from academics and practitioners alike (Ivens, Pardo and Tunisini, 2009). This observation is in contrast with the fact that different authors have long underlined that marketing organization constitutes an understudied topic.

Marketing organization globally refers to the question of “who does what?” in the field of marketing (Workman, Homburg and Gruner, 1998). However, several dimensions of the topic can be distinguished: Marketing organization is concerned with “marketing structure” (Achrol, 1991, 1997; Achrol and Kotler, 1999; Ruekert, Walker and Roering, 1985); with the relative power of marketing inside a firm (Anderson, 1982; Day, 1997; Piercy, 1986; Piercy and Morgan, 1989; Workman et al., 1998); with the contingency of marketing organization on specific environmental variables (Ruekert and Walker, 1987; Piercy, 1986); and finally with marketing activities or processes (Diller and Ivens 2006). The most prominent contributions to the latter area stem from Workman et al. (1998) and Webster (1997).

Interestingly, only few authors have looked at the very “basic” and fundamental question “which kind of activities firms are undertaking when doing marketing?”. A possible answer to the question could be that it is evident what activities firms perform when doing marketing (“everybody knows what doing marketing means”...). The wide scope of those activities that are considered to constitute marketing, ranging from discrete “marketing mix activities” as one extreme on a continuum to “relational marketing activities” on the other provides another possible explanation (Harris and Ogbonna, 2003).

Yet, both of these answers are not satisfying; in particular, because there is little empirical evidence concerning the question. The purpose of this work-in-progress paper is to contribute to filling this gap. We investigate whether, along a certain number of organizational dimensions, different configurations of marketing organizations can be distinguished. The remainder of our paper is as follows. We first provide a short overview of the marketing activities literature. We then present an exploratory empirical study using cluster analysis. Finally, we discuss our results and present avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing can be described in different ways. The discipline disposes of certain strategic concepts, instruments, and methods. It can also be (and is, in the current definition provided by the American Marketing Association) described as a set of activities directed at creating and claiming value. Different attempts have been made to provide lists of marketing activities. Some of these lists are rather old ones (see Jones, 1943 Ryan, 1935; Shaw, 1912; Westerfield, 1915), others are more recent (Moller and Rajala 1999; Wills and Hayhurst 1971) but “marketing activities” are rarely at the center of marketing research. Piercy already noted in 1986: “*As to precisely what these functions are, or should be, there is some room for debate*” (Piercy, 1986, p. 268).

WHAT MARKETING ACTIVITIES ARE: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW.

In the 1970s, Wills and Hayhurst (1971) identify what they refer to as “*the critical tasks for marketing in the future*” (Wills and Hayhurst, 1971, p. 50). These critical tasks are: pricing, customer services, logistics, market data, communication, planning, channel strategy, new product and new market development, technical and market assessment.

George and Barksdale (1974) in their attempt to compare marketing activities within service and manufacturing firms identify four categories of marketing activities: 1) offering activities; 2) pricing activities; 3) advertising and promotion activities; and 4) marketing research activities. Those categories resulting in no less than 26 detailed tasks ranking from “*determination of which new products or services to offer*” (George and Barksdale, 1974, p. 66) to “*the evaluation of customers needs and wants*” (George and Barksdale, 1974, p. 68).

Piercy (1986), studying marketing integration with other functions, lists seven marketing functions: sales, distribution; customer service; trade marketing, advertising, export and marketing research. His empirical study shows that responsibilities of the Chief Marketing Executive on these activities are largely shared with other non-marketing functions.

Lehmann (1997) observes that marketing has evolved from a “*preoccupation with tactics – the 4Ps – to a heavy emphasis on strategy*” (Lehmann, 1997, p. 123). He thus describes the “future” function of marketing as follows: 1) marketing will be in charge of customer (acquisition, retention, expansion and deletion); 2) marketing will be responsible for the 4Ps and service for existing products; 3) Marketing will provide information about the environment. 4) Marketing will also be a lead partner for decisions concerning markets entry (business or region to be in) and also for developing, testing and introducing new products. Such tasks are for the authors only “a scenario” of marketing future. In another scenario, those tasks could be boiled down to the implementation of 4Ps, and as the authors ironically say marketing will become the department of “*cent-off coupons and blue-light specials*” (Lehmann, 1997, p. 135).

Srivastava et al. (1999) are interested in the integration of marketing with business processes. And in consistence with Lehmann’s work, propose 3 processes. Those processes are not explicitly under the responsibility of the marketing function, but, as the authors explain marketing will have to “infuse” the teams guiding these processes. The three central processes are: product development management, supply chain management, and customer relationship management.

Moller and Rajala (1999) working on the marketing organization of industrial high-tech companies describe marketing activities organized in three “marketing domains”, 1) sales and service, 2) product management, and 3) marketing communication.

Zoltners (2004) (quoted by Rouziès et al., 2005) working on the marketing/sales interface provides a description of those marketing activities that are considered as “*primarily undertaken by the marketing with input from sales*” namely: competitive analysis, market research market segmentation; product development, product positioning, pricing, packaging and advertising. Another set of activities is also considered as being “*effectively performed*” through an interaction between marketing and sales, they consist of: target marketing, sales forecasting, customer account selection, value proposition development and promotions. Lastly, marketing also have a role in a third set of activities for which sales is the leader function, those sales activities with marketing input are: competitive market intelligence, personal selling, distributor management, account management, merchandising, installation and after-sales service.

An extensive view of what marketing activities are is proposed by Kotler and Armstrong (2005): “*many people think of marketing as only selling and advertising. But marketing combines many activities – marketing research product development, distribution, pricing, advertising, personal selling and others*” (Kotler and Armstrong 2005, p. 33)

Hawes et al. (2006) building on the work from Beckam and Davidson (1962) (quoted by Hawes et al., 2006) present eight “universal” marketing functions (Hawes, Baker et d’Amico., 2006, p. 108): 1) Buying and 2) Selling (which, together, constitute activities of exchange); 3) Transporting 4) Storing (which are Supply or Physical Distribution activities) and finally 5),

Standardization and Grading 6) Risk bearing and 7) Financing and 8) Marketing Information (considered as “Facilitating Functions”)

Even more recently, Verhoef and Leeflang (2009) working on the influence of marketing departments described as marketing activities the following tasks: 1) advertising, 2) relationship management (including satisfaction measurement and improvement) and 3), segmentation, targeting and positioning. The authors also show through their empirical study that “*pricing and distribution are now covered by other departments such as sales and finance*” (Verhoef and Leeflang, 2009, p. 26). In so doing, these authors are sharing the point the view from Sheth and Sisodia (2005) that marketing is concerned with tactical activities such as advertising, sales support and public relations.

SUMMARY OF THE MARKETING ACTIVITIES LITERATURE

Summarizing the state of the extant literature, several observations can be made.

First, no general consensus on what precisely the scope of marketing activities is exists. To caricaturize the situation, one may say that those marketing activities range from nearly nothing (the “*cent-off coupons activity*” according to Lehmann’s own phrase... Lehmann (1997, p. 135) to nearly everything (see McKenna (1991) and its “marketing is everything” where the author argues that marketing “*is not a function but an all-pervasive way of doing business*”. McKenna (1991, p. 65)). Recently, Webster et al. (2005) reported on the declaration of two managers: “*The chief executive of a consumer packaged-goods company told us: “I have always defined marketing as brand management plus sales.” Another explained that his marketing department had gone from “advertising and merchandising to being part of the sales and service division*”. (Webster, Malter and Ganesan, 2005, pp. 36-37). The authors use this quotation to illustrate how hard it is to define what marketing is.

Second, activities that are defined as “marketing activities” are – in a majority of cases – described as being not under the sole responsibility of the marketing function or department. These activities are more and more seen as “joint activities” taken in charge by different functions in the organization. Piercy (1986) advocated for instance that some companies could be regarded as marketing-oriented without any marketing organization. The idea that marketing (as a function) does not manage some of the marketing activities but rather they are under the control of other departments or functions has been developed by various authors (Homburg, Workman and Jensen, 2000; Krohmer, Homburg, and Workman, 2002; LeMeunier-Fitzhugh and Piercy, 2007; Rouziès et al., 2005; Webster, Malter and Ganesan, 2005).

Third, if marketing is “everywhere”, it seems that the idea of the “marketing department” (or any equivalent structure) still has the favor of authors. Moller and Rajala (1999) for instance taking into account that the decentralization of marketing have put “*great pressure on inter-unit coordination and communication*” advocate for a kind of “*new marketing centers, comprising representatives from all the relevant units*” (Moller and Rajala, 1999, p. 534). The same with Webster et al (2005). The authors describe “*a central tendency for marketing to be dis-integrated and exported to various parts of the organization*” (Webster et al., 2005, p. 37) and express their concern, about how to sustain the development of marketing competency within the firm in such a situation. They then advocate for “*a small marketing centre*” rather than “*a large corporate marketing group*” which role will be to “*enable collaboration among an array of dispersed marketing elements*” (Webster et al. 2005, p. 42). For Kotler and Armstrong (2005), “*company must design a marketing organization that can carry out marketing strategies and plans*” (p.61), and as soon as the company is big enough “*a marketing department emerges to plan and carry out marketing activities*” (Kotler and Armstrong, 2005, p. 62).

Fourth, works on marketing activities raises the problem of the distinction between “marketing activities” and “sales activities” Guenzi and Troilo (2006) following Cespedes (1993) and Dewsnap and Jobber (2000) explain that in “modern companies, Marketing and Sales are kept separate due to the specialized tasks each is called upon to deal with in the external environment” (Guenzi and Troilo, 2006, p. 975). This view of marketing and sales being two different functions is supported by various authors: “in large organizations, sales and marketing are frequently structured as separate and discrete departments” (Piercy, 1986; Workman et al., 1998) and perform different functions (Shapiro, 2002)” (Lemeunier–Fitzhugh and Piercy, 2007, p. 940). Marketing is considered as focusing on “customer marketing, brand management, advertising management, marketing research” while the Sales department is about activities like “trade marketing, trade negotiations, channel management being considered rather as Sales activities” (Guenzi and Troilo, 2006, p 975). Nevertheless, Lemeunier–Fitzhugh and Piercy (2007) insist on the fact that “organizations and customers habitually see sales and marketing as a single function; customers do not usually differentiate between sales and marketing departments and consider them to perform a single purpose (Cespedes, 1993, 1994; Webster, 1997; Yandle and Blythe, 2000) (Lemeunier-Fitz-Hugh and Piercy, 2007, p. 940). Kotler (1977) considers “sales and distribution as the major elements of the marketing mix” (p. 68), and if - as far as organization is concerned - the author advocates for an approach where “the marketing director would not have control or responsibility for field sales” (p. 75), he also indicates that “over time, the marketing director might be promoted to marketing vice president to run all the marketing activities, including sales”... (Kotler, 1977, p. 75).

Finally, beyond listing what marketing activities are or should be no attempt is really made to propose possible configurations of these activities. Ghosh et al. (1994) are interested in determining the conditions of performance of different companies focusing on their marketing characteristics, but they do not specifically pay attention to which kind of activities they are performing, rather they focus on their orientation (production, selling and marketing) and structure (by products, markets, or countries...). The same with the works from Ruekert et al. (1985) or Walker and Ruekert (1987). Though building on the issue of how to organize marketing activities, these authors do not question the nature itself of marketing activities. They rather focus on structural aspects of marketing organizations. The same, again, with the work from Vorhies and Morgan (2003). The authors focus on marketing activities by raising the issue of how marketing organization fit with business strategies, but they do not investigate specifically the nature of those marketing activities.

RESEARCH METHOD

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

A written survey was conducted among French industrial companies operating on an international or global level. These companies belong to different activity sectors, they have different size, and interviewees belong to different marketing or sales functions. Out of 1850 questionnaires mailed to companies, 203 were returned (return rate of 13,5%). This response rate compares favourably with other similar studies in the area (Workman et al., 1998; Hombourg et al., 2008).

The characteristics of the sample organizations are shown in Table 1, including number of employees, existence of a marketing department, business unit sales and sector (industrial goods vs. consumer goods). Respondents were mainly "marketers" (57%) (product managers, brand managers, marketing directors, etc) "salespeople" (10,5%), "sales and marketing managers" (9,5%) "general managers" (8%), other respondent occupy other various functions (project managers, consultants,...). The distribution of respondent companies across firm size

categories was fairly broad. Hence, we are confident that the sample provides a relatively good mirror image of the French industrial sector.

Table 1 – Profile of respondents

	N	Percentage
<i>Sales volume</i>		
Under €50 million	85	41.8
Over 50 – 100	12	5.9
Over 100 – 250	28	13.8
Over 250 – 1,000	33	16.3
Over 1,000	45	22.2
Total	203	100
<i>Number of employees</i>		
Under 100	28	13.8
Over 100 – 500	53	26.1
Over 500 – 1,000	37	18.2
Over 1,000	85	41.9
Total	203	100
<i>Industry sector</i>		
Aeronautics & Defense	2	1.94
Automotive	10	4.93
Bank & Insurance	20	9.85
Chemicals	9	4.43
Communication / High tech	7	3.45
Construction	4	1.97
Consumer goods	10	4.93
Energy	11	5.42
Food Industry	25	12.3
Machinery & Equipment	36	17.73
Other type of manufacturing	39	19.21
Pharma. & Health	14	6.9
Services	12	5.91
Transportation	3	1.48
Other (Wholesale)	1	0.49
Total	203	100

QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTRATION

The survey was directly mailed to the respondents. The letter explained the purpose of the research, and included a copy of the survey. Efforts were made to enhance the response rate by sending an e-mail containing the survey to managers two weeks after the initial mailing, and by offering to respondents a composite summary of results (Forza, 2002). The survey was also pilot tested in two phases. The draft questionnaire was first sent to four academics, expert in the area, and then to four practitioners who were asked to comment on the content, clarity and scaling of the instruments. Several minor changes were made as a result of this feedback.

NON-RESPONSE BIAS

Test for non-response bias were carried out by comparing early respondents (responses received within the first two weeks) and later respondents (responses received within the third week or later) (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). A *t-test* of difference was conducted on firm size (employees and sales), and mean responses to each variable. No statistically differences were identified at $p < 0.05$.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES

A partir d'une revue de la littérature, une liste de 22 activités marketing a été établie. Celles-ci comprenait à la fois des activités liées aux 4 grandes variables du marketing mix (produit, prix, place et promotion) et des activités propres aux relations clients/distributeurs, aux études de marché, à la segmentation et au positionnement. Chaque item ou activité était mesuré à

l'aide d'une échelle en sept points de type Likert (1 pas du tout d'accord ; 7 tout à fait d'accord). Le répondant devait alors indiquer si cette l'activité considérée correspondait selon lui à une activité marketing au sein de son entreprise.

RESULTS

A principal component factor analysis with orthogonal rotation in SPSS 15.0 was used to conduct item reduction and to obtain meaningful factors. Items with low loadings of less than 0.45, or loadings on multiple items, with difference between weights of less than 0.10, were deleted from the analysis. The internal consistency of the factors obtained was then assessed using Cronbach's α coefficients. The factor loadings, eigen values and variance explained for each factor are shown in Table 2. According to the results, six dimensions or factors can be identified and qualified:

- Factor 1 includes all the activities linked to the management of product/service offerings;
- Factor 2 represents all the activities dedicated to the management of customers and distributors;
- Factor 3 encompasses all the activities related to market studies and segmentation;
- Factor 4 refers to activities linked to logistics and supply chain management;
- Factor 5 includes all the activities associated with communication and public relations;
- Factor 6 represents the activities dedicated to the creation of new products/markets.

Table 2 – Factor loadings of marketing activities

Item	Management of product/services offerings	Management of customers/distributors	Market studies and segmentation	Logistics and supply chain	Communication and public relations	Creation of new products/markets
acti-1			0.63			
acti-2			0.86			
acti-3			0.71			
acti-4		0.54				
acti-5		0.53				
acti-6	0.82					
acti-7	0.86					
acti-8	0.55					
acti-9	0.70					
acti-10	0.75					
acti-11	0.68					
acti-12		0.64				
acti-13		0.78				
acti-14		0.58				
acti-15						
acti-16						
acti-17					0.85	
acti-18					0.85	
acti-19				0.81		
acti-20				0.89		
acti-21						0.81
acti-22						0.88
Eighen values	6.26	2.31	2.18	1.89	1.27	1.07
Variance explained	28.47	10.54	9.93	8.61	5.77	4.88
ALPHA	0.86	0.78	0.68	*	*	*

* could not be calculated with only two items

The data was analyzed in two stages. The first stage was designed to cluster the firms (n = 203) according to marketing activities based on six factors: management of product/services offerings, management of customers/distributors, market studies and segmentation, logistics

and supply chain, institutional communication and public relations, and creation of new products/markets.

STAGE 1: CLUSTER ANALYSIS

Cluster analysis is a statistical technique that groups objects according to characteristics that they possess, such that clusters exhibit high internal homogeneity and high external heterogeneity (Hair et al., 1998). Following the principal factor analysis reported above, we entered the data into a straightforward cluster analysis (Everitt, 1993) in SPSS 15.0 known as “Quick Cluster (K-Means). It assigns cluster membership to each case (i.e., respondent) on the basis of minimum within-cluster and maximum between-cluster distance from cluster centers for the variables entered. The analyst is required to specify the number of clusters in advance. Since the number of clusters cannot be assumed to be naturally given, it is customary to run the analysis several times with different numbers of clusters and then to select the result that yields the clearest and most meaningful set of clusters. Hierarchical cluster analysis can also be used alongside “Quick Cluster”, as we did in this study, in order to facilitate the selection of meaningful number of clusters (see also Bunn, 1993). It turned out that dividing the 203 cases in this study into three clusters makes the most sense. Table 3 gives the cluster centers after nine iterations for the six constructs. It also shows the proportion of cases per cluster. The main challenger in any cluster analysis is to interpret the technical result in such a way that a meaningful *typology* of cases is obtained. Because the analysts’ interpretations is involved and because the number of clusters is not naturally given, a note of caution is called for: the types/clusters identified are not real in a positivist sense, but serve only as a heuristic tool to bring out general differences within the population. As such, clusters simplify and exaggerate.

Table 3 – Cluster centers, distribution of cases, and cluster labels

Constructs	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Total sample
Management of product/service offerings	5.88	4.62	3.24	4.58
Management of customers/distributors	5.12	4.15	2.68	3.98
Market studies and segmentation	6.45	6.34	4.90	5.90
Logistics and supply chain	4.22	1.59	1.69	2.5
Communication and public relations	5.13	4.28	3.81	4.41
Creation of new products/markets	6.12	5.94	2.88	4.98
Number of cases	71	104	28	203
Proportion (%)	34.9	51.2	13.9	100
Cluster label (type)	Value Chain marketing	Exploration Marketing	Analysis Marketing	

STAGE 2: CLUSTER INTERPRETATION

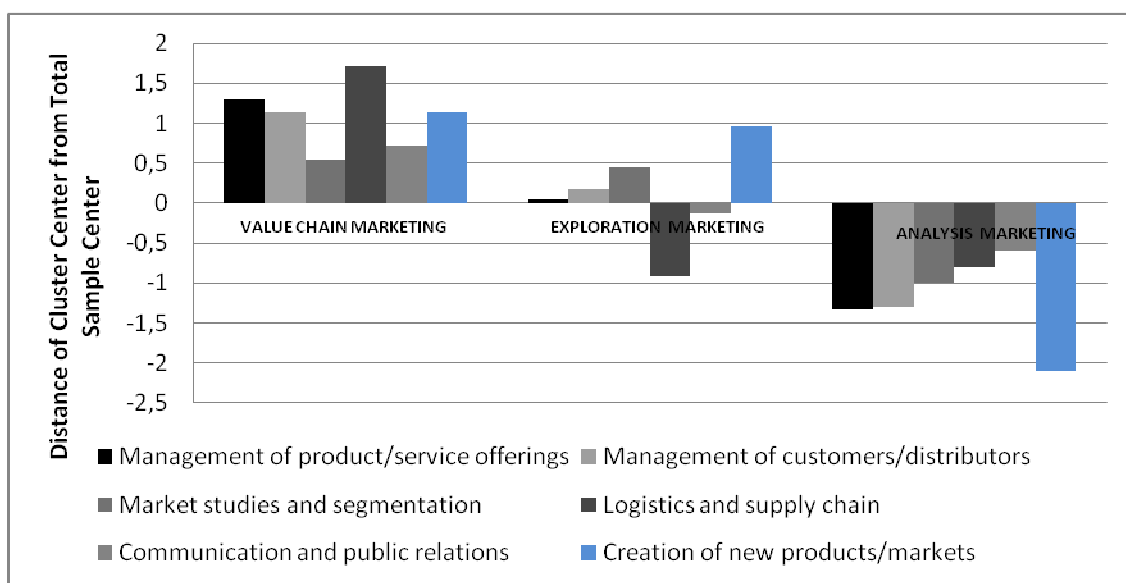
The interpretation of clusters becomes easier, if the cluster centers are displayed graphically. For our results, the interpretation is further facilitated by showing the distance of cluster centers from the overall sample center for each variable (Fig. 1). This graphic representation plus some imaginative thinking gives the following typology of activities considered as marketing activities among French companies.

- The first cluster is labeled “*Value Chain Marketing*”. It represents more than a third of the respondents (34.9%) and is characterized by high levels on the different activities

dimensions. In this cluster, marketing is considered as the management of the whole activity of the firm from one end of the value chain to the other. This is also the cluster where marketing displays the highest level of activities connected to logistics issues.

- The second Cluster is described as “*Exploration Marketing*”. It represents more than the half of respondents. The firms in this cluster still consider marketing as being connected to many activities, but with a clear focus on “market research” and “new product development/new market development”.
- Cluster 3 is labeled “*Analysis Marketing*”. This cluster is the less important in size representing less than 14% of the respondents. It is also the cluster with the lowest levels of marketing activities linked to the different dimensions evoked. In this cluster marketing is predominantly seen as an activity of market studies and segmentation.
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Figure 1 – Graphic representation of cluster characteristics



DISCUSSION

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this work-in-progress research was to analyze which activities companies subsume under the heading of marketing. As discussed in our introduction, the question is relevant and important because despite an apparent agreement among scholars about what marketing is and what it is not, practical evidence suggests that practitioners are far from interpreting the area of marketing in a homogeneous same way. Hence, we set out to collect evidence about the variance in interpretations.

The fact that we do find quite strong variance in managers views of what precisely constitutes a marketing activity and what not first of all points to a lack of conceptual clarity in the academic literature on marketing. Obviously, scholars have not been successful in communicating a clear vision of their discipline and its scope.

A reason why we observe this variance in interpretations may lie in the fact that different sectors or different types of companies that are active on different types of markets may need to develop different types of marketing activities. However, so far the marketing discipline lacks a systematic contingency approach to the study of marketing activities. We believe that a key implication of our results is that scholars still need to develop a systematic classification of marketing activities. We further believe that few theoretical frameworks in marketing make a contribution to defining the scope of marketing through a clear set of activities.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Beyond their theoretical implications, our results also have implications for management practice. Top-level managers in companies need to ensure that their firm remains in phase with its markets and customers. A key mechanism for ensuring such market orientation is the implementation of marketing concepts and principles in the form of marketing organization. Marketing organizations attributes responsibilities and competencies for certain activities to people and functions. Our results show that there is a wide variance in what activities become translated into marketing organization. In some firms, there may be little awareness that the activities defined as marketing activities in their case may not be the complete set of marketing activities or of activities to be considered as such. Managers may want to verify whether their current definition of marketing activities is appropriate and whether they are aware of all potentially relevant marketing activities. Reading our preliminary results they may develop new ideas about different interpretations of marketing activities and of possible constellations of marketing activities inside their firm.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As all research, our study presents several limitations, particularly since this paper still is work-in-progress.

The first limitation concerns the national focus of our sample. We have collected data from French companies only. Given the results of comparative organizational studies from the extent literature, we expect that marketing organization and, hence, the firm-specific perspective on marketing activities is determined by a number of contingency factors. Future research should aim at building a European data base and analyze to what extent the national and cultural frameworks in which companies operate or that they originate from have an impact on the definition of marketing activities.

Second, in our analysis we have not distinguished between B2B and B2C constellations. Our data base contains the information which respondent company serves business markets and which one consumer markets. We suspect that there may be a difference in what marketing activities will be at the center of marketing on what type of market. Hence, our own future research will aim at analyzing the importance of market type for marketing activity definition. Third, our analysis and our description of activity clusters remain descriptive. As such, they allow understanding what constellations exist inside companies. They do not allow judging what impact specific constellations have on marketing performance or firm performance. Future research should attempt to link activity constellations to such outcome variables.

Fourth, in certain cases within our sample we dispose of multiple informants per company. These informants work in different departments. So far, we do not exploit this information contained in the data. Against the background of recent studies analyzing differences in the thought worlds of different departments inside one company we suspect that the perspective on what constitutes a marketing activity or not may also vary from respondent to respondent depending upon his or her attachment to specific departments. For example, marketers may have a tendency to define marketing activities more broadly than colleagues working in departments such as logistics. Future research can be directed at studying such differences.

Summarizing, we see several interesting theoretical and managerial implications as well as avenues for future research in our work-in-progress research. We encourage scholars to develop new research in the area and we intend to develop our own analyses further.

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