



MASTER'S THESIS

HOW DO YOU 'MARKET-ING'?

EXPLORING MARKETING PRACTICE IN COMMERCIAL
ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Marketing practice has to do with how practitioners carry out marketing activities, mostly in the context of business. Currently, the marketing discipline faces a gap between practice and theory, which has generated confusion amongst practitioners on the role and functions of marketing. Additionally, marketing has been disproportionately practised at a tactical level, which contributes to the field losing its place in strategic planning and decision-making.

Considering these problems and given the lack of studies that address how marketing is being practised by commercial organizations, the main purpose of this study has been to develop an understanding of the role that marketing plays in organizations, the way it is structured and what functions are attributed to it. This research builds on empirical data collected mainly through interviews to marketing decision-makers in commercial organizations.

Three main findings were revealed by this research: market orientation is the unifying idea of the role of marketing, the marketing structure goes beyond a department, and marketing functions skew towards communication. At a theoretical level, this study adds to the current literature by presenting the relevance of market orientation, expanding the notion of structural marketing, and confirming that currently marketing skews towards communication, raising relevant questions of its' impact. At a practical and managerial level, this research contributes to the understanding of how marketing is practised. It may help marketing practitioners and decision-makers to reflect on the role, structure, and functions of marketing in their organizations.

RESUMO

A prática de marketing consiste na forma como os profissionais realizam atividades de marketing, principalmente no contexto de negócios. Atualmente, a disciplina de marketing enfrenta uma lacuna entre a prática e a teoria, o que tem gerado confusão entre os profissionais sobre o papel e as funções do marketing. Adicionalmente, o marketing tem sido praticado de forma desproporcional a nível tático, o que contribui para que a área perca o seu lugar no planeamento estratégico e na tomada de decisões.

Perante estes problemas e dada a escassez de estudos que abordem como o marketing está a ser praticado nas organizações comerciais, o objetivo principal deste estudo foi desenvolver uma compreensão do papel que o marketing desempenha nas organizações, a forma como está estruturado e quais as funções atribuídas ao mesmo. Esta pesquisa baseia-se em dados empíricos recolhidos principalmente por meio de entrevistas a tomadores de decisão de marketing em organizações comerciais.

Três descobertas principais foram reveladas por esta pesquisa: a orientação para o mercado é a ideia unificadora do papel do marketing, a estrutura do marketing vai além de um departamento e as funções do marketing tendem para a comunicação. A nível teórico, este estudo acrescenta à literatura atual ao apresentar a relevância da orientação para o mercado, expande a noção de marketing estrutural e confirma que atualmente o marketing inclina-se para a comunicação, levantando questões relevantes sobre o seu impacto. No nível prático e empresarial, esta pesquisa contribui para a compreensão de como o marketing é praticado. Pode ajudar os profissionais de marketing e tomadores de decisão a refletirem sobre o papel, a estrutura e as funções do marketing nas suas organizações.



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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, marketing has grown as a relevant discipline in the context of business and management. Some envisage marketing as a philosophy of management (Harvey, 1996), others as a science (Shelby D Hunt, 1976), and others even as an art (Hutchinson, 1952).

Regardless of the many viewpoints from scholars and practitioners, marketing is accepted as a discipline – a branch of knowledge (Bartels, 1951). It has an interdisciplinary nature, and throughout its evolution benefited from the contributions of economics, sociology and psychology, amongst others (Edwards et al., 2020; Webster, 1992). This interdisciplinary background certainly contributes to the myriad of definitions and perspectives that continue to exist on marketing (Brunswick, 2014).

Taking a broad perspective, some authors suggest that marketing has been employed for thousands of years (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995), but the emergence of marketing as a discipline is widely recognized as having happened around the 1900s (Bartels, 1976; Wilkie et al., 2003).

It is commonly accepted that two main complementary takes on marketing can be discerned: marketing practice and marketing thought (Jones & Shaw, 2018). The first is focused on how practitioners carry out marketing activities, mostly on the context of business. The second, marketing thought, is centred on how marketing is studied and taught, mostly in the context of academia (Shaw, 2015). This divide has contributed to a gap between theory and practice, which has been considered to be widening in recent years (Kumar, 2017; Mason et al., 2015).

On the one hand, scholars are often criticized for failing to provide up to date necessary support for practitioners, especially when addressing an ever-changing market environment (Kumar, 2017). On the other hand, practitioners are at times accused of ignoring important theories and not employing enough academic resources (Lilien et al., 2002; Webster, 1992).

It is in this context that multiple authors believe that scholars and practitioners need to cooperate more, to develop theories and tools that can be put to practice by marketing practitioners, towards the marketing problems they are confronted with (Cornelissen, 2002; Foltean, 2019; Mason et al., 2015).

Another problem that the marketing discipline is claimed to be facing is the excessive propensity to employ marketing at an essentially tactical level, disregarding its importance and value as a contribution to the strategic management of commercial organizations (Contreras et al., 2016; Cornelissen, 2002). Some authors argue (e.g., Ritson, 2017; Sharp, 2017) that this 'tactification' of marketing is also a reflection of the poor marketing knowledge of practitioners, as they do not know the difference between tactical execution and strategic planning. Marketing practitioners, including managers, often confuse what marketing is and what functions they should perform (Contreras et al., 2016; Verhoef et al., 2011). This confusion became exacerbated in the last decade, with the explosive growth of digital, and the current use of marketing as a tool in this domain often directed simply to generate sales, which further leads to some practitioners disregarding the strategic role of marketing (Binet & Field, 2013; Ritson, 2017).

In light of these problems and given the lack of studies that address how marketing is being practised by commercial organizations (Hackley et al., 2011; Kumar, 2017),



especially in an age where change, globalization and technological innovation are more prominent than ever (Edwards et al., 2020; Leeflang et al., 2014; Rangnekar, 2018), the focus of this research was set on the following purpose: explore how marketing practice is approached in commercial organizations.

To reach this purpose, the following research questions are pursued:

- (1) what role does marketing play within commercial organizations?
- (2) how is marketing structured in commercial organizations?
- (3) what functions are attributed to marketing in commercial organizations?

This research builds on empirical data collected mainly through interviews with marketing decision-makers in commercial organizations (i.e., for-profit organizations). It involves organizations with different dimensions (micro, small, medium, and large) and from different industries.

This thesis is organized into the following five main chapters: (1) literature review, which presents current knowledge to provide an understanding on the practice of marketing; (2) methodology, where the methodological approach and process are presented and justified; (3) findings from the data collection; (4) discussion of the findings; and (5) conclusions of the research, as well as its implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organized into four main sections. In the first section, an overview of the literature on marketing practice is provided. In the following three sections the research questions' topics are addressed: role of marketing, marketing structure and marketing functions within organizations.

1.1. MARKETING PRACTICE

“What is marketing work?” That’s the phenomenological question that many authors believe is missing in marketing research (Kumar, 2017; Skålen & Hackley, 2011; Svensson, 2007). The answer is much more complex, contested and differentiated than conventional marketing theory portrays (Skålen & Hackley, 2011).

Various authors tried to define and redefine how marketing should be practised. We have seen this in literature such as “Marketing Revolution” (Keith, 1960), “Marketing Reinvented” (Grönroos, 1994) or “Rethinking Marketing” (Rust et al., 2009). On the one hand, these scholars contribute to the development of the field, e.g., the decade of the 1980s saw marketing practice shift dramatically towards service and relationship marketing (Hackley, 2009; Hunt, 1994). On the other hand, these scholars promote a new viewpoint by undermining a previous one, which results on concepts such as ‘traditional marketing’ or ‘relationship marketing’ being perceived as conflictive (Harris & Ogbonna, 2003).

Marketing theory and practice face different realities, as scholars and practitioners fail each other. The first are late to support practitioners and the latter neglect important theories (Kumar, 2017; Lilien et al., 2002; Mason et al., 2015; Webster, 1992). To exacerbate the problem, the importance of marketing to the strategic management of commercial organizations is being disregarded, with the focus being instead on the tactical level (Contreras et al., 2016; Cornelissen, 2002).

To tackle the gap between theory and practice, it is believed that marketing theory has to be conducted towards practice and the marketing problems that practitioners are confronted with (Foltean, 2019; Mason et al., 2015). Moreover, authors believe the marketing discipline should adopt a more strategic orientation within research and organizations (Hunt, 1994; Webster, 2009).

Skålén & Hackley (2011) introduced the concept of ‘marketing-as-practice’, which overlaps two main lines of thought: marketing theory should be oriented towards practice and marketing should have a strategic role. The term is centred on practice theory – a type of social theory with a particular focus on practices (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002). It is also based on strategy-as-practice (Skålén & Hackley, 2011) – the study of social activities, processes and practices related to strategy, strategic management and organizational decision making (Golsorkhi et al., 2010).

The reason why strategy is so important to marketing is that authors believe a strategic orientation results in maximum value for the organization and having a marketing department with a strategic role enhances an organization’s performance (Kumar & Shah, 2009; Wirtz et al., 2014). However, in the past years, the marketing department has lost influence on the company’s decision-making (Homburg et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2011).

More recently, marketing practice has followed a more digital and technological route. The integration of information technology into contemporary marketing practice has drastically changed the field (Brady et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2020). Globalization and technology, driven by the mobile phone and the internet, spawned new paradigms on marketing in the areas of online advertising, e-commerce and social media (Rangnekar, 2018). Media usage patterns have undergone significant changes over the years, with people spending more time on interactive media (social media) than on traditional media (radio and print). These changes in usage patterns have affected marketing practice in terms of budget resource allocation, forcing organizations to rethink their marketing (Kumar, 2015).

When it comes to marketing practice, there are three main areas usually explored: the role of marketing, the marketing structure, and the marketing functions. The next section approaches the role of marketing within organizations.

1.1.1. Role of Marketing

The role of marketing within organizations is a conflicting philosophical question and represents the core of the phenomenological question “what is marketing work” (Moorman & Rust, 1999; Svensson, 2007). In recent years, the role of marketing became understood as a core process that is consumer-centred and associated with the company (Dubickis & Ginevičius, 2014). However, marketing didn’t always have a managerial focus (Webster, 1992).

Marketing emerged as a growing field in economics (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Wilkie et al., 2003), as the result of the evolution of sales and distribution (Cornish, 1995). Its role in the first half of the 20th century was to support mass production and decrease costs as a means to maximize profitability (Converse, 1921; Shaw, 1912). It later evolved to a key role in the relationship between the company and the buyer, with a prominence of sales and advertising (Coviello et al., 1997; Macpherson & Nelson, 1940).

It was from the 1950s to the 1970s that marketing shifted towards a managerial perspective (Wilkie et al., 2003). Authors like Peter Drucker argued that marketing was no longer a separate function, but the entire business seen from the customer's point of view (Uslay et al., 2009). Strategy planning became an important marketing function (Mclean, 1958), and due to its' increasing importance, the marketing function was often confused with strategy and business development (Webster, 1992).

Around the 1980s the role of marketing leaned towards relationship building and management (Grönroos, 1994). The growing affluence of a relationship approach to marketing represented a trade-off, as it was commonly opposed to a transactional viewpoint of marketing (see table 1).

	Transaction Marketing	Relationship Marketing
Focus	Economic transaction	Interactive relationship between buyer and seller
Decision focus	Product or brand	Relationships between individuals
Marketing function	Marketing mix	Service marketing mix
Measurement	Monitoring market share	Managing customer base
Time perspective	Short-term focus	Long-term focus

Table 1 - Transaction v. Relationship marketing (adapted from Coviello et al., 1996; Grönroos, 1994)

From the 1990s forward, marketing took a more tactical role (Edwards et al., 2020; Rangnekar, 2018). Communication became a key element of marketing activities (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998) and it was later maximized by technology, with advancements in advertising and information (Kitchen et al., 2004). Globalization and technological advancements led to the digital marketing era (Jain & Yadav, 2017; Rangnekar, 2018), and scholars and practitioners defined marketing mostly as communication and promotion (Jain & Yadav, 2017; Khan & Siddiqui, 2013).

The issue of the role of marketing is complex. For instance, even though digital is a common viewpoint, it is still considered a new field and it raises questions on how it fits with all other aspects of marketing (Khan & Siddiqui, 2013). Also, even though the consumer is viewed as the core of marketing practice (Rust et al., 2009), critical perspectives argue the power of marketing management over consumers is exaggerated (Skålén & Hackley, 2011).

However, it seems there is a common point in the role of marketing and a concept that is usually mentioned in marketing practice and theory: market orientation (Merlo & Auh, 2009; Moorman & Rust, 1999; Oliveira & Luce, 2020; Wirtz et al., 2014). Market orientation is the degree to which an organization generates and uses intelligence about the current and future customer needs and develops and implements a strategy to meet those needs and wants (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). According to Levitt (1960), the concept of market orientation is the heart of marketing theory and it has been proved to have a positive impact on the financial performance of organizations (Moorman & Rust, 1999; Verhoef et al., 2011).

Marketing plays a crucial role in successfully implementing and managing market orientation because it promotes the customer's voice internally and is often

responsible for relevant market, customer, and competitors' insights (Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010; Wirtz et al., 2014). The growing loss of influence from the marketing department and the increasing adoption of market orientation may indicate that organizations need to rethink how they structure the role of marketing (Oliveira & Luce, 2020). The next section of the literature review explores marketing structures.

1.1.2. Marketing Structure

Throughout the years, companies have changed in the way they organize marketing (Kirova et al., 2017; Webster, 1992). The most common way of structure is the marketing department, which began to be employed in Northern American organizations in the 1950s, usually as an extension of the sales department (Rangnekar, 2018; Webster, 1992). The implementation of this functional department was pioneered by consumer goods manufacturers such as Procter & Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive, General Mills and Gillette (Strasser, 1989; Webster, 1992).

When it comes to the structure and functions of marketing, there are two aspects to consider. Firstly, every company is different, so the organizational structure reflects its specific characteristics. Secondly, any emerging marketing challenge or objective can expand into an ongoing marketing function and become the basis for the structure of the marketing department (Dubickis & Ginevičius, 2014).

The organizational marketing structure considers three characteristics: centralization, formalization, and specialization (John & Martin, 1984; Kirova et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2015). Centralization reflects the extent to which marketing activities

and decisions are concentrated within a few positions (John & Martin, 1984). Formalization is the emphasis placed on following specific rules and procedures in carrying out a plan formulation, including documentation of planning activities and adherence to job descriptions (John & Martin, 1984). And specialization represents the skills or expertise required for jobs in the organization (Leeflang et al., 2014).

The marketing structure can take many forms. It can be centralized in a department, or decentralized throughout the organization, with a presence in various other departments or business units. Its' structure and functions can also be formal or informal (John & Martin, 1984; Kirova et al., 2017), depending on various aspects of the organization. However, according to John & Martin (1984), the marketing structure can be characterized by three components: departmental specialization (see figure 1), spatial dispersion (see figure 2) and diversity (see figure 3).

The first organizational structure – departmental specialization – consists of the integration of organised marketing activities into a specialist marketing department (Piercy, 1986) (see figure 1). The marketing area is divided into many organizationally distinct functions and subunits (John & Martin, 1984).



Figure 1 - Market specialization department, adapted from John & Martin (1984) and Dubickis & Ginevičius (2014)

Dubickis & Ginevičius (2014) explored a marketing department essentially in two levels: the top level, which could be led by a VP Marketing, Chief Marketing Officer, Marketing Director (McNamara et al., 1972); and the lower level, which are groups defined by the primary functions necessary to the department.

The second structure is spatial dispersion, where the marketing professionals is spatially dispersed throughout the organizational structure (John & Martin, 1984), with operational marketing teams within each business unit (Kirova et al., 2017). In structures like this, the responsibility for many marketing tasks may be less centralized, and every organizational function and actor is encouraged to contribute (Merlo & Auh, 2009). These are also called decentralized marketing groups (Workman et al., 1998).

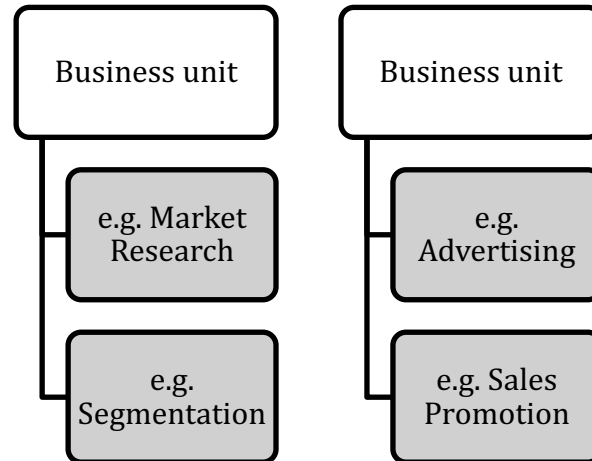


Figure 2 - Spatial dispersion, adapted from John & Martin (1984) and Dubickis & Ginevičius (2014)

Companies are most likely to have decentralized, autonomous business units when there the marketing activities and tasks have a low level of relatedness (Workman et al., 1998).

The third organizational structure is diversity, where the marketing responsibilities within the organization are heterogeneous concerning skills and specialized knowledge rather than bureaucratically imposed differences (John & Martin, 1984). Structures like this are less bureaucratic and less formal, which is believed to enhance the creation of innovative ideas and quick responses to market opportunities (Denison & McDonald, 1995).

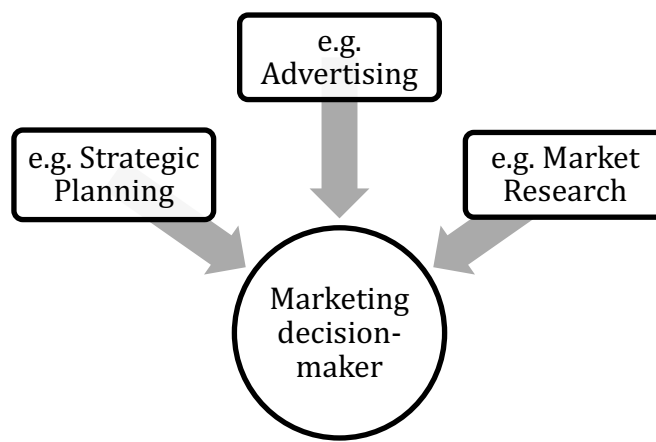


Figure 3 - Diversity, adapted from John & Martin (1984) and Dubickis & Ginevičius (2014)

The understanding of marketing's organization is not just related to the marketing department. It also depends on the distribution of functions within the organization (Dubickis & Ginevičius, 2014). The marketing functions are analysed in the next section.

1.1.3. Marketing Functions

There are various suggestions for the responsibilities and functions of the marketing practitioners within the organization (Converse, 1921; Hooley et al., 1990; Macpherson



& Nelson, 1940; Mclean, 1958; Walsh & Lipinski, 2009). So, what does a marketer do? Research findings reveal that the marketing manager's functions can be defined in six dimensions (Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010):

- (1) Marketing mix management
- (2) Managing internal relationships
- (3) Strategy development and execution
- (4) Managing external relationships
- (5) Data and knowledge management
- (6) Managing marketing productivity and performance

Throughout the years, these dimensions have been covered by various authors in the form of various marketing functions (table 2).

Dimensions	Description of marketing functions
Marketing management mix	Assembling and dividing of goods, grading, sorting, packing and standardizing of goods (Converse, 1921); New product development, product design, R & D (Hooley et al., 1990; Walsh et al., 2009); Promotions, pricing (Hooley et al., 1990); Trade marketing, distribution (Hooley et al., 1990); Introducing and speeding the adoption of innovations in distribution processes (McLean, 1958); Advertising (Hooley et al., 1990);
Managing internal relationships	Resource management, employee's relationships, quality management and organizational communications (Finney & Hansen, 2010); Training and development, internal communication (Akbari et al., 2017)
Strategy development and execution	Planning the marketing strategy (McLean, 1958); Expansion into new geographic markets and strategic direction of the business unit (Walsh et al., 2009); Distribution strategy (Walsh et al., 2009)
Managing external relationships	Customer satisfaction measurement and improvement program, design of customer service and support (Walsh et al., 2009); Selling (Macpherson & Nelson, 1940); Responsibility for selling job and finding customers (McLean, 1958)
Data and knowledge management	Analysis of business facts about marketing operations (McLean, 1958); Marketing research, sales forecasting (Hooley, Lynch & Sheperd 1990)

Managing marketing productivity and performance	Performance of market share, sales growth, and profit (Chung, 2009); Brand performance analysis, supply-chain analysis (Wirtz, 2014)
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Table 2 - Dimensions and description of marketing functions

Marketing Mix Management

The 'marketing mix' was introduced by Borden (1964) as an integrated set of marketing tactics, meant to contribute to the organizational objectives and improve the relationship with customers. It was later classified and redefined by McCarthy (1960) into four categories, creating the concept of the 4Ps – product, price, place and promotion –, which continues to be a reference along with the additional Ps introduced by other marketers.

Managing the marketing mix is related to the management and execution of activities related to product, prices and pricing, distribution, and promotion (Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010). These activities have been the core of marketing practice for almost a century (table 2).

Although pricing and distribution decisions were originally marketing responsibilities, these two variables are increasingly distant from the marketing department (Homburg et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2011). Research developed by Gök and Hancıoglu (2010) indicates that even though the marketing concept embraces all four Ps in literature, promotion is the only one commonly assigned to the marketing manager.

The marketing mix and the 4Ps are now viewed critically and considered an old paradigm (Webster, 2009). However, they evolved throughout the years to new models such as the 7Ps introduced by Boom and Bitner (1981). The three new Ps – people,

processes, and physical evidence – are often integrated into the marketing mix but are approached in this literature in the dimensions of internal and external relationships.

Managing Internal Relationships

Managing internal relationships is related to partnering, coordinating, and working closely with cross-functional teams, other marketing functions and top management. It can also involve recruiting, training, and monitoring the marketing staff (Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010).

This dimension fits the description of ‘internal marketing’, a concept that considers the employees as the internal market of an organization (Varey, 1995). It is linked to all internal activities of an organization but is especially related to human resources management (Collins & Payne, 1991).

Strategy Development and Execution

The essential terms of the strategy are related to marketing, as the company's marketing policy is the basis for planning all aspects of the company's activities. In this context, marketing can be divided into two levels: strategic and tactical (Dubickis & Ginevičius, 2014). Strategic marketing involves a continuous analytical process focused on decisions like strategy type (e.g. cost vs. differentiation), value proposition/ positioning and market selection/ targeting (Morgan et al., 2019). As for the tactical level, it consists of an active short-term planning process, majorly related to sales and communications (Dubickis & Ginevičius, 2014). Tactics are mostly associated with the marketing mix (Morgan et al., 2019).

Within the dimension of strategy development and execution, positioning seems to be the most common domain (Morgan et al., 2019). It was introduced by Trout (2004), and consists of creating an image or identity in the minds of the target market. It can be effectively applied as a key component of marketing strategy and tactics.

Managing External Relationships

The management of external relationships network is mainly related to customer relationship management. It involves developing, coordinating, and managing relationships with external agencies for roles such as advertising, PR and media. Managing relationships with key industry organizations, partners, suppliers, and competitors is also part of this dimension (Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010).

The concept of relationship marketing was introduced in the 1980s, raising important topics like retaining customers or regaining lost customers. It was defined as “attracting, maintaining and (...) enhancing customer relationships” (Berry, 2002, p. 21), but is now extended to the relationships with various stakeholders (Edwards et al., 2020; Grönroos, 1994).

Data and Knowledge Management

Managing data and knowledge consists of developing, monitoring, and analyzing formal research on customers, industry, and market (Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010).

The continuing integration of information technology into marketing practice is of critical importance to this dimension. It contributes to the development of databases for better customer relationship management, helps in the development of research



and facilitates the analysis and planning on systems of decision support, marketing planning or enterprise resource planning (Brady et al., 2002).

Managing Marketing Productivity and Performance

The management of marketing productivity and performance is related to developing and reporting performance analysis and financial metrics for marketing, including budget management (Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010).

Documenting how marketing activities contribute to the organization's financial performance is one of the biggest challenges within marketing functions (Sheth & Sisodia, 2002). However, companies are affluently moving towards continuous, ongoing monitoring and analysis of the market wants and competitive activity (Denison & McDonald, 1995). And even though marketing is losing its place within decision-making (Contreras et al., 2016; Cornelissen, 2002), its' responsibilities still involve controlling marketing conditions (e.g., market share) and performance (Chung, 2009).

2.METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology used in this thesis is presented and justified.

2.1. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how marketing practice is approached in commercial organizations. To reach this purpose, the following research questions are pursued:

- (1) what role does marketing play within commercial organizations?
- (2) how is marketing structured in commercial organizations?
- (3) what functions are attributed to marketing in commercial organizations?

2.2. RESEARCH APPROACH

The present study is exploratory, as there is a lack of literature exploring marketing practice in organizations (Kumar, 2017; Skálén & Hackley, 2011), especially when it comes to understanding different approaches.

The research methodology is qualitative, as this is the most appropriate method to focus on issues relevant to the practice of marketing (Coviello et al., 1997). This method of research is well suited for the understanding of the phenomena of marketing practice in commercial organizations since it is a social practice inserted in organizations, where their context is important (Sofaer, 1999). The advantages of



qualitative methods also include the flexibility of research, and the capacity to establish new insights and to reveal subjective associations of meaning (Morgan et al., 2019).

Additionally, the study is inductive – it builds on cases of commercial organizations, and from there, develops and presents insights related to marketing practice, and specifically to the research questions (Bernard, 2006).

2.3. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The qualitative data collection techniques used in this research are the following:

- Semi-structured interviews
- Documental analysis

The semi-structured interviews were used to explore the structure, functions, and role of marketing within the organizations of decision-makers that take part in this research. These interviews are adequate to understand the thoughts of each individual (Adams, 2015), which is particularly important when it comes to the role that marketing plays – it's a complex topic that may require discussion or further explanation. Given the exploratory nature of the study, semi-structured interviews are also appropriate to explore topics that may not have been considered in the interview script. Even when it comes to the marketing structure and functions, the description of these might not be enough to understand how marketing is structured and what are the main marketing functions in the organization. Therefore, the flexibility that semi-structured interviews provide is deemed as important for this research (Morgan et al., 2019; Sofaer, 1999).

The documental analysis was used to collect relevant information before the interviews with the decision-makers. It was helpful to understand the role of the interviewee and analyse the participating organizations.

2.4. RESEARCH PROCESS AND SOURCES OF DATA

In this section, the research process, empirical settings, and sources of data are presented. This study focuses on commercial organizations: micro, small, medium, and large for-profit enterprises. Studying these types of enterprises gives a higher chance to find a wide variety of different realities and practices of marketing.

A total of 19 organizations were selected for this research, based on the diversity of industries and dimensions, so that the study would not be biased toward a specific industry or organization dimension. Table 3 shows the criteria for each dimension.

Dimension	Number of people	Volume sales	Total annual balance
Large	More than 250	More than €50M	More than €43M
Medium	50 to 250	€10M to €49M	€10M to €42M
Small	10 to 49	€2M to €9M	€2M to €9M
Micro	Less than 10	Less than €2M	Less than €2M

Table 3 - Dimensions' criteria of organizations in Portugal, adapted from INE (2007) and OECD (2020)

To be considered as belonging to a specific dimension, an organization must fit at least two of the criteria. Each interviewee was also asked the dimension of their organization.

The empirical data was collected mainly through interviews to marketing decision-makers in commercial organizations (i.e., for-profit organizations). These decision-

makers were chosen based on the abovementioned diversity of dimension and industries and on convenience (i.e., interviewers' network connections). Most participating organizations are in the north of Portugal, but their activity goes beyond local and even national markets. Table 4 presents the companies, their industry and dimension.

Company	Industry	Dimension
A Cântara	Food Production	Micro
Amorim Cork Composites	Paper & Forest Products	Medium
Arcádia	Food Production	Medium
Banco Carregosa	Banking	Large
Cardan	Automotive	Medium
Central Lobão	International Trade and Development	Medium
E-Goi	Information Technology and Services	Medium
ERN Construções	Construction	Small
F5 - TCI	Information Technology and Services	Micro
Global Wines Portugal	Wine & Spirits	Small
Grupo Montalva	Food Production	Medium
HRP Textile Agency	Textiles	Micro
Insilis	Higher Education	Large
Jota Barbosa Interiors	Interior Design	Small
Lusíadas Saúde	Health, Wellness and Fitness	Large
MSTN Group	Chemicals	Large
Panidor	Food Production	Large
SONAE MC	Retail	Large
SUMOL+COMPAL	Food and Beverages	Large

Table 4 - Sources for phases 1 and 2 by company, industry, and dimension

Most of the participating organizations were medium or large, given that these may have more resources to have highly structured and developed marketing practices. The research was conducted in three phases, as shown in table 5.

NO.	DESCRIPTION
PHASE 1	Interviews with marketing experts, to gain more sensitivity to the study of marketing practice; documental analysis of the participating organizations to prepare the following two phases.
PHASE 2	Interviews to identify the structure and functions of marketing in the selected companies (research questions 2 and 3).
PHASE 3	Interviews to identify the role(s) of marketing within the selected companies (research question 1).

Table 5 - Process of research by number, name, and description

Phase 1 was used to explore the state of marketing practice, by interviewing marketing experts. Their viewpoints were helpful to prepare the interviews for the subsequent phases.

The purpose of phase 2 was to collect data to answer research questions 2 and 3. In this phase, marketing decision-makers were interviewed and asked to describe the marketing structure and the marketing functions in their organization.

The third and last phase was centred on research question 1. Based on the different structures and functions analysed in the previous phase, marketing decision-makers were chosen to explain the role of marketing in their organization. Each phase is presented next, with a detailed view of the sources of data and process of research.

2.4.1.Phase 1

In this first phase, 3 marketing professors and consultants were interviewed, given their knowledge and expertise – they have the academic and professional backgrounds that help describe and discuss the state of marketing practice in organizations. Each interview had an average duration of 45 minutes. Table 6 presents the interviewees, their role, company, and industry.

Interviewee	Role	Company	Industry
Rafael Cerveira Pinto	Managing Partner	Squadra – marketing & sales consultants	Management consulting
Carlos Brito	Vice Dean	Universidade Portucalense	Higher education and consulting
Nino Carvalho	Professor and consultant	Nino Carvalho Consultoria e Capacitação	Higher education and consulting

Table 6 - Sources for phase 1 by interviewee, role, company, and industry

This exploratory phase was also used to analyse information on participating decision-makers and their organizations: LinkedIn profiles, company pages, online posts, websites, and online news. These were helpful to understand any relevant characteristic of the organizations or decision-makers before the interviews. With the exploratory phase completed, the data collection for phase 2 follows, which is presented next.

2.4.2.Phase 2

In this phase, 19 marketing decision-makers were interviewed, to understand how marketing is structured and what are the main marketing functions in their organizations (research questions 2 and 3). These decision-makers include directors, managers and heads of marketing, brand, communication and/or sales.

Each interview had an average duration of 15 minutes. Table 7 presents the interviewees, their role, and their company.

Interviewee	Role	Company
Benedita Barreiros	Marketing Manager	Jota Barbosa Interiors
Bruno Oliveira	Senior Brand Manager	SUMOL+COMPAL
Bruno Rio	Area Manager	SONAE MC
Bruno Rocha Carvalho	Head of Marketing	ERN Construções
Catarina Castro	Head of Marketing	Panidor
Catarina Neves	Marketing Manager	F5 – TCI
Diogo Mota	Marketing and Sales Manager	Arcádia
Fabiana Pais dos Santos	Marketing Manager	Amorim Cork Composites
Jacinto Almeida	Head of Marketing and Communications	MSTN Group
João Pintado	Marketing Director	Central Lobão
Jorge Queirós	Marketing Director	Cardan
Marcelo Caruana	Marketing Director	E-Goi
Marco Andrade	Head of Marketing	Grupo Montalva
Miguel Dias	Marketing Executive	A Cântara
Nuno Espanha	General Manager (ex-Head of Marketing)	Lusíadas Saúde
Rui Correia	Head of Marketing and Sales	Global Wines Portugal
Rui Oliveira	Marketing Manager	HRP Textile Agency
Tiago Fleming	Chief Marketing Officer	Banco Carregosa
Vera Carvalheira	Brand Manager	Ensilis

Table 7 - Sources for phase 2, by interviewee, role, and company

After the data collection for phase 2 was completed, phase 3 began – this phase is presented next.

2.4.3.Phase 3

Given that the role of marketing is the most abstract, philosophical, and therefore complex research question of the, it was developed last. After a first analysis of the data collected in phase 2, a total of 8 marketing decision-makers from the previous 19 were selected to participate in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This selection was based on the different structures and functions across the 8 organizations. These were

also different in terms of industry and dimensions (i.e., micro, small, medium, or large), so that the findings wouldn't be biased towards a specific industry or dimension. Each interview had an average duration of 30 minutes. Table 8 describes the interviewees, their role, company, and industry.

Interviewee	Role	Company	Industry
Benedita Barreiros	Head of Marketing	Ferreira de Sá Rugs	Interior Design
Bruno Rio	Area Manager	SONAE MC	Retail
Bruno Rocha Carvalho	Head of Marketing	ERN Construções	Construction
Catarina Castro	Head of Marketing	Panidor	Food Production
Jacinto Almeida	Head of Marketing and Communications	MSTN Group	Chemicals
João Pintado	Marketing Director	Central Lobão	International Trade and Development
Jorge Queirós	Marketing Director	Cardan	Automotive
Tiago Fleming	Chief Marketing Officer	Banco Carregosa	Banking

Table 8 - Sources for phase 3, by interviewee, role, company, and industry.

Upon completion of phase 3, the content from the data collection was analysed. The next chapter details the process and method for the data analysis.

2.5. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis method used in this study was based on the work of Bardin (2006) and follows the model guidelines for interview-led research (Câmara, 2013). The content analysis had three steps: pre-analysis, material exploration, and interpretation of results.

The first phase consisted of organising the collected data from the 30 transcript interviews. Throughout the first reading, the relevant data of each interview was

organised per research question (e.g., the phase 2 interviews, to 19 marketing decision-makers, had relevant of structure and functions of marketing; therefore, were divided and attributed to research question 2 and 3, respectively).

The second phase was the material exploration, where the transcript interviews were analysed in-depth, to find excerpts with similar perspectives or patterns. As the analysis progressed, these similarities and patterns were turned into categories, which were gradually defined and refined.

In the third and last phase, the results for each research question were interpreted to develop insights. Therefore, the analysis is twofold: it uses the results to describe the patterns of marketing practice in the participating organisations; and it interprets the reasons behind these patterns of marketing practice, providing new understandings.

3. FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings are analysed and interpreted, for each research question.

3.1. ROLE OF MARKETING

The first research question relates to the role of marketing. The respondents showed different viewpoints and approaches to marketing practice and the role of marketing. Table 9 shows the findings for this first research question.

Role of Marketing	
Categories	Empirical excerpts
Satisfaction of customer needs	"[Marketing] is a set of actions that are naturally, let's say, planned and integrated to respond to customer needs." (E2)
Lead generation	"[Marketing] It's for you to create communication channels and ways to communicate to create new leads and retain a potential customer, a potential employee, that is, a possible person who is interested in your business." (E16)
Market orientation	"[Marketing] is the eyes of the business for what is happening outside (...) many times we don't create the wheel; we look to the wheel that is already there (...) and having these eyes is half the way to being faster to act (...) this type of competencies could be in an IT team, in the board of directors, in a commercial team (...) they [marketers] have a different sensibility and can see an intangible value that other departments or people can't." (E8) "[Marketing] is growingly attached to the business DNA across the company (...) the company has to be market-oriented (...) in fact, there is no successful company that does not have a market vision; that has no market orientation." (E15)
Associated value creation	"One of my passions for marketing is persuasion and its' strength (...) basically, the client shows the part or engagement he has for the brand." (E5) "Marketing is the associated value that we deliver to the product and service." (E12) "Marketing must be seen fundamentally from a value creation perspective. Which means value for the company that uses it and value for the customer because that's the only way it is sustainable." (E21)

Holistic management	<p>“I see marketing as focusing on serving the customer in an increasingly holistic, efficient way and serving the customer first (...) Marketing is this ability of an organization to serve a customer holistically and efficiently.” (E3)</p> <p>“Marketing for me is nothing more than finding mechanisms to reach a certain goal. Whether through communication, positioning or pricing (...) What we do is transversal in organizations.” (E4)</p>
Innovation	<p>“Look, it's more [than the definition of marketing], that's why I'm so excited. There is an area here that I had never done before, which is the innovation area. Until now, until the date of joining this company, I only had to add associated value. Now I must deliver the opportunity (...) that is, bring another way of looking at the product and that's what happened (...) I am much more focused on innovation than on added value.” (E12)</p>

Table 9 - Findings from the data collection for the role of marketing

There were 6 different roles of marketing mentioned from the 11 respondents (marketing experts in research phase 1 and marketing decision-makers in phase 3). The most common roles of marketing were value creation and market orientation.

When asked about the role of marketing, a common thought between all respondents was customer/ consumer. The understanding of the customer’s needs and wants seemed to be a must-have to develop the role of marketing, even if the description of the role was abstract like “respond to customer needs” or specific to a function like “lead generation”. However, a few respondents went beyond the customer and mentioned competitors or market trends. For these, the customer was still important, but the centre of decision-making and the role of marketing was related to the market and all its’ components. To these respondents, the role of marketing is market orientation.

Value creation was the most common answer, and it can even be associated with “satisfaction of customer needs” and “innovation”. For these respondents, the role of marketing is to create value for customers/ consumers, and marketing is seen as the process of doing so. The difference is between associated value creation vs. value



creation. While some respondents viewed marketing to create value - through, for example, innovation -, others believed marketing creates associated value, which means that through a brand or communication it adds value to a product or service. Other respondents were more incisive in the management side of marketing. They believed that marketing is - or should be - the leading type of management in the organization.

Overall, the various viewpoints weren't conflicting; in reality, they were complementary. The respondents saw marketing as a type of management that should be holistic to the whole organization. They believed that this type of management is centred in a market insight or customer/consumer need, on which the organization focuses to create value. Moreover, the respondents - some better to translate in words than others - described marketing as a "sensibility" or a way of seeing and thinking business from the "outside". This description is related to market orientation, in the sense that "sensibility" is the type of thinking that leads them to make choices, and the "outside" is the market, which is the basis of their decision-making.

3.2.MARKETING STRUCTURE

The second research question relates to the marketing structures. There were various similarities across the respondents' descriptions, which resulted in four types of marketing structures. Table 10 shows the findings for this research question.

Marketing Structure

Categories	Empirical excerpts
Centralized marketing department	<p>"It [marketing] is centralized in a department, that is, where I am the marketing director and then there is a team of various elements from different areas of marketing that support all the company's activities." (E4)</p> <p>"Marketing is all done in-house. I have a team and I'm the one who coordinates the team." (E5)</p> <p>"It's all centralized in my department, and I manage marketing." (E10)</p> <p>"It's all within a marketing and communication department that in the past was separated and ended up being merged recently." (E15)</p> <p>"At the moment, we have a marketing department. It's me and two other people." (E16)</p>
Marketing across business units	<p>"The marketing team is divided into mega departments (...) and start to branch out into different teams." (E3)</p> <p>"In the group, we have 4 units (...) it's me and four managers [per unit]." (E12)</p>
One person structure	<p>"The marketing structure of my company is a one-man department, where it's exclusively me, and I make the decisions." (E9)</p> <p>"The decision-making power and the entire strategic base are part of one person. The rest [of the company] are supporting and sharing knowledge." (E13)</p>
Hybrid of department and business units	<p>"Marketing has a central structure and then has a set of people who are pivots in the units. It's almost a matrix structure. You have central functions. And then there are several people in the units (...) and everything works together." (E1)</p> <p>"Our model contemplates, let's say, marketing as an aggregating department of all business units, reporting directly to the administration (...) with two operational directors; each of these is responsible for several business units and marketing works with those boards." (E2)</p> <p>"A mixed model, so we have a model in which I have specialists in some areas, and I have people who are more transversal to the areas." (E11)</p>

Table 10 - Findings from the data collection for marketing structure

Across the 19 interviews, 4 types of marketing structures were described. The most common was the centralized marketing department – a structure that resembles a hierarchy (usually two levelled), where there is a marketing leader (normally the marketing director) and then a team, with different responsibilities, reporting to the leader. In this type of structure, the respondents explained that all marketing responsibilities are centralized in the department. In most cases, the cross-departmental activities would be internal marketing or communication with the



human resources department or joint commercial work with the sales department. A small number of respondents described a different structure, where marketing responsibilities would be distributed across different marketing actors in distinct units. This structure was common in organizations that were divided into different business units (common in manufacturing companies), therefore requiring marketing decision-makers per unit.

The respondents from organizations with a larger dimension described a mix of the previous two structures. These would have a centralized marketing department, usually responsible for strategic marketing, and then various marketing actors across different business units. On the other side of the spectrum (organizations of micro dimension), the structure was different. Given the low level of resources, both human and financial, there would only be one person responsible for marketing. Other people in the organization, usually from the commercial area, would help in marketing responsibilities if needed.

3.3.MARKETING FUNCTIONS

The third and last research question are the marketing functions. The respondents described various sets of functions, which resulted in twelve categories. Some of these were constant patterns across all organizations, while others were rarely mentioned or assumed as marketing functions in these organizations. Table 11 shows the findings for this third research question.

Marketing Functions

Categories	Empirical excerpts
Product or service management	<p>"[We manage] a part of the production, a part of what the company needs to sell some products or innovate and launching of new products." (E7)</p> <p>"[In the team] I have a product manager." (E11)</p>
Marketing communications	<p>"All communication management is done centrally by the marketing department." (E2)</p> <p>"We are much more focused on the logic of communication and promotion." (E3)</p> <p>"The [marketing] department is much more focused on communication rather than the strategic part." (E4)</p> <p>"I'm responsible for everything that relates to online communication for the website and our online store." (E7)</p> <p>"We have 3 people doing all the management of social media and newsletters because we still live off newsletters (...) it's fundamental." (E12)</p> <p>"[Functions] are more in the digital area; LinkedIn, website, e-mail marketing." (E13)</p> <p>"We have a person that is extremely linked to digital marketing. Focuses a lot on social media, website (...) it's something we invest a lot, in terms of paid advertising." (E16)</p>
Content management	<p>"The content management component, which is a person who develops specific content (...) a person who centralizes content creation." (E3)</p> <p>"There is a copywriter (...) and a graphic designer [in the department]." (E5)</p> <p>"The design department is rooted [within the marketing department]." (E7)</p> <p>"We are working in the area of design, content development." (E8)</p> <p>"We have someone that currently only creates content." (E16)</p>
Internal marketing and communication	<p>"Yes, we work in collaboration with HR. Internal communication is under the responsibility of HR and we in marketing naturally collaborate in supporting the production of content and the creation of channels." (E2)</p> <p>"It is the next step to implement [internal communication]." (E5)</p> <p>"It's a bit of a hybrid, yes. We have already carried out some actions together, other actions entirely under the responsibility of human resources and it has also been the other way around." (E7)</p> <p>"I have many internal activities planned (...) and corporate social responsibility - the person responsible for that it's me." (E9)</p> <p>"After a long time, I managed to get them [board of directors] to understand the importance of communicating internally." (E11)</p>
Brand Management	<p>"[The brand managers] have the product development pipeline and then all the strategy design. Targeting and product value proposition (...) brand positioning (...) from the development of the communication strategy to the actual implementation and when I say the implementation it's 360: multimedia, trade marketing and digital in coordinating with the various teams." (E3)</p> <p>"[As a brand manager] you have all the analytical part (...) let's call it the brand finances. Then, the digital part (...), then communication and content (...) and brand activation." (E6)</p>

<p>Strategy development</p>	<p>“At the moment no, there is not a lot of support at the strategic level, that is, everything that is part of the strategy is under my responsibilities.” (E4)</p> <p>“There is an area that is strategic marketing (...) it defines what are the strategic pillars of the brand, in a macro kind of way.” (E6)</p> <p>“I can’t focus on strategy because I must answer clients, manage social media from the creation, tone of voice, copy.” (E9)</p> <p>“As I am the marketing and the sales director, I end up having input from the sales team. I pass them on to the marketing team and together we define the proposals that we take to the administration.” (E11)</p> <p>“I have the marketing strategy along with the commercial strategy.” (E16)</p>
<p>Commercial support</p>	<p>“We support all the company’s activities and work very, very closely with the sales team.” (E4)</p> <p>“There is a joint work with the sales and customer marketing teams”. (E5)</p> <p>“I manage two teams and have a marketing team at the service of the brands and the service of sales.” (E11)</p>
<p>Customer and supplier relationships</p>	<p>“And not only the relationship with the customer, but it is also very important, and this relates with the analytical part, which is the CRM, that is within the responsibility of marketing.” (E2)</p> <p>“I’m also the one who prospects for new suppliers.” (E9)</p> <p>“We guide the supplier, but it is negotiated and managed by the purchasing department.” (E11)</p>
<p>Market intelligence</p>	<p>“No, no, we don’t have it yet, we don’t have any element focused on the analytical side. You’re talking to him, who has, let’s say that, that function.” (E2)</p> <p>“The entire analytics team that performs customer segmentation and analysis to increasingly optimize the promotional component and understand what megatrends are happening to boost the sales team.” (E3)</p> <p>“The person who manages the projects also manages the analytical data and shares it with the team.” (E11)</p> <p>“I live a lot of data, so Kantar and Nielsen [data tools] are my best friends.” (E12)</p> <p>“We produce information internally (...) we gather, treat and distribute information to the interested departments (...) but we also resort to production of external information, namely purchasing of studies or through agencies.” (E15)</p>
<p>Management of the marketing team and performance/productivity</p>	<p>“What occupies more in the day to day up and management of the team. The management of teamwork.” (E5)</p> <p>“I am responsible for [profit] margins, volume, sales.” (E6)</p> <p>“I manage two teams and have a marketing team at the service of the brands and the service of sales.” (E11)</p> <p>“I am the maestro of the orchestra. My biggest concern is to manage resources.” (E15)</p>
<p>Management of marketing activities’</p>	<p>“We work [with agencies] on the brand management part, on the video development part, for example.” (E4)</p>

outsourcing and relationship with marketing partners	<p>“Externally, we have everything related to digital marketing. I hired an outside agency to do everything PPC (...) we are developing a new website and that implied another subcontracting of an agency specializing in web design.” (E5)</p> <p>“Everything related to PR, we have an agency for that.” (E6)</p> <p>“We have an agency that is a great support to the development, namely of online advertising campaigns.” (E7)</p> <p>“The accountant has his accounting firm. He helps us with salaries, invoicing, and other things we don’t have [internal] knowledge to do.” (E14)</p>
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Table 11 - Findings from the data collection for marketing functions

The 19 respondents described 12 different marketing functions. Most functions were related to the marketing mix, specifically, communication management: marketing communications, content management and even internal communications showed to be a big part of the marketing responsibilities. In terms of other marketing mix functions, only product or service management was mentioned by more than one respondent. This is common in marketing teams that had at least one product manager or in cases where the marketing decision-maker was also responsible or worked closely with product development and innovation. In the case of pricing, this added to the findings as a responsibility that various respondents assumed as not a part of their marketing team, even though they recognized it was an important function of the marketing mix.

Internal marketing and internal communications showed to be an important part of marketing responsibilities and a growing concern within marketing teams. In many cases, there were functions shared with the human resources department but led by the marketing department. The dynamic between departments and sharing of responsibilities was also common externally – it was common for respondents to describe functions associated with sales or supply. Most respondents mentioned a strong link with the sales department and shared commercial responsibilities.



Additionally, a few organizations had customer and supplier relationships under the marketing department.

Strategic management and marketing intelligence were very common functions across all participating organizations. The marketing department is responsible for analysing the market and use insights to develop or propose (to the board of directors) the marketing strategy. The big difference between organizations was the resources that they had at their disposal – large enterprises had human resources, high-end analytical tools and in some cases even agencies dedicated to market intelligence. Brand management was commonly associated with strategic marketing and market intelligence functions. It was a characteristic common to large enterprises with various brands, with these functions usually centralized in one marketing decision-maker responsible for the management of a specific brand or set of brands.

Considered by many decision-makers as the most important function, managing the marketing team and its performance/ productivity was a common mention. This includes not just internal teams such as marketing actors in a department, but also external teams such as agencies or consulting firms for outsourced functions. These functions, under outsourcing, were mostly related to operational communication activities.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research provided an understanding of marketing practice in the studied organizations. As the study was conducted with separate research questions in mind, each of these represents a relevant discussion topic. However, the discussion topics are intertwined, and their dynamics are presented throughout the discussion.

4.1. MARKET ORIENTATION AS THE UNIFYING THINKING ON MARKETING PRACTICE

The first discussion topic is related to the role of marketing, as it has implications on the other discussion topics. When analysing all the 30 interviews, the respondent's way of thinking about marketing practice can be divided into three levels: market orientation, strategy, and tactics. While defining marketing and describing its' role, the respondents either showed tactical thinking, strategic thinking or thought immediately of the market. However, regardless of the way they described their viewpoints, it could always be traced back to market orientation as the unifying thinking of the role of marketing. Therefore, market orientation surrounds and impacts strategy and tactics (see figure 4), which suggests that strategic and tactical planning should be market-oriented, the same way tactics should follow strategic guidelines (Chernev, 2014; Deshpande, 1999; Kanagal, 2017).

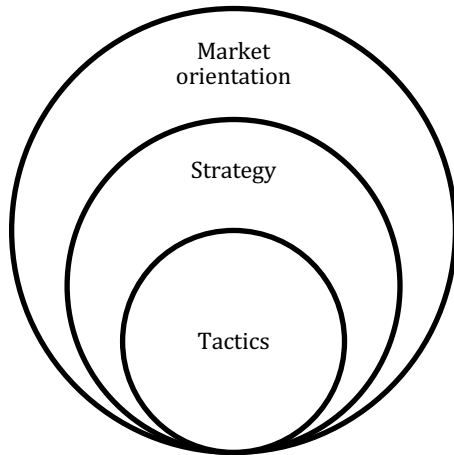


Figure 4 - Three bands of marketing practice, adapted from Chernev (2014) and Deshpande (1999)

Tactics (inner ring): All respondents showed knowledge of the marketing tactics of their organizations. The only difference is that each organization requires different tactics depending on their dimension, industry, and level of competitiveness. However, the ‘tactification’ of marketing issued by various authors (Chernev, 2014; Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010; Ritson, 2017) shows to be true – the role of marketing is disproportionately tactical rather than strategic. The tactical viewpoint of the role of marketing is often mentioned by most marketers, who think marketing is just the way we communicate with customers, and obsess about content, copywrite and social media (Contreras et al., 2016; Ritson, 2020) – this is further analysed in ‘marketing functions skew towards communication’. The tactical band isn’t only composed of communication. A very common view is the role that marketing has in the commercial side of the business, and how it impacts sales directly: leads generation, customer relationship management and customer loyalty and retention. This viewpoint is the marketing decision-makers response to the objectives of the sales-centric organization, that see marketing as a tool to maximize sales. However, the respondents seemed to always keep in mind that all marketing and sales efforts must be customer-

centric and market-oriented and admitted trying to promote this to the rest of the organization. Tactics are an important part of marketing practice but are meant to serve a bigger, broader strategic role (Dubickis & Ginevičius, 2014; Chernev, 2014).

Strategy (middle ring): The viewpoints that are considered as of the strategic band are the ones that associate marketing with value proposition/ positioning and market selection/ targeting (Morgan et al., 2019). Even if the respondents didn't develop the strategy themselves, they were aware of the strategy and seem to execute it accordingly (i.e., their tactical planning and execution follow strategic guidelines). Most respondents with strategic thinking viewed marketing and its' role in their organizations as a way of developing value to the consumer and positioning the brand. There were also mentions marketing segmentation and targeting, especially in organizations where the main marketing functions revolved around strategy development and market intelligence. These respondents seemed to have a more holistic view and approach to marketing practice, compared to the tactical band. For them, marketing isn't only meant to be a tool of communication or commercial support, but rather an engine of value creation to all stakeholders. To most respondents, the starting point to that value creation was the market: it focused on consumers' needs and wants and was used to achieve differentiation versus competitors.

Market orientation (outer ring): Regardless of what the respondents defined as the role of marketing, most of their thoughts and practices can be tracked to market orientation. However, in this band are considered the viewpoints that described market orientation as the role of marketing. These respondents were aware of the dynamics of their markets, which allows them to have a deep and critical understanding of their strategy. It also works as a guide to their marketing tactics,

helping them in decision-making – they think the business from the outside (market) in (business). Going back to the literature review, marketing orientation is the degree to which an organization generates and uses intelligence about the current and future customer needs and develops and implements a strategy to meet those needs and wants (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). The “degree” suggests that market orientation isn’t an off and on switch, but instead a spectrum (see figure 5).



Figure 5 - Spectrum of market orientation

This spectrum helps us understand that market orientation is a process, that can be continuously improved. And to improve it, the organization must consider all aspects of the market that affect business – this is where most of the interviewees’ thinking failed, especially the ones with tactical and strategical viewpoints. Throughout time, companies have tried to go from product orientation to market orientation (Kirova et al., 2017) (see figure 6).

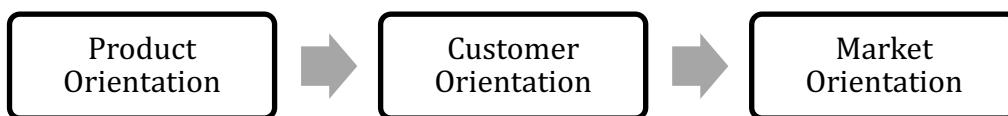


Figure 6 - Organizational orientation, adapted from Kirova et al. (2017)

However, customer orientation still seems to be the perceived role of marketing to many marketing professionals and organizations (Kirova et al., 2017). This doesn’t necessarily mean that organizations got stuck in time, as it was suggested by Levitt

(1960) when companies up to the 1960s were stuck with a product orientation. Nonetheless, could it be that this bias towards customer orientation may still result in new marketing myopia, where decision-making is biased toward customers and not the market? This could mean that important aspects of the market like competition, market indicators (i.e., market share instead of sales) or even category trends (i.e., trends that move a market and not only a specific consumers' segment) are ignored and therefore decision-making lacks important market information. In this research, the disregard of competitors, market indicators or category trends was clear. The respondents that believed the role of marketing to be market orientation were the only ones that mentioned competition, market indicators and category trends when talking about the role of marketing in their organizations. One of these respondents explained that market trends in their industry were bringing new players to the market and that it was an immediate concern of the marketing department; as such, the marketing decision-maker was promoting a new approach to the business model based on these trends that would affect consumption and ultimately their customer base.

Achieving a market orientated organization raises two issues: sharing resources (including market knowledge) across departments is difficult; and the interactions between the three bands of marketing practice require all decision-makers to work towards market orientation (Kirova et al., 2017). To do that, the organization must have a structure that promotes market orientation, as well as functions that are centred in understanding and acting on the market (Kanagal, 2017). The next discussion topic addresses the structure issue.

4.2. MARKETING STRUCTURE GOES BEYOND A DEPARTMENT

All the structures described by the interviewees fit with the ones identified in the literature review (Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010). The only difference was in a few organizations that had hybrid structures, between marketing departments and business units. However, the structure of marketing has proven to be more than just the department or the decision-maker (in the case of “one person structures”). The findings of this research show that even if most marketing functions are centralized within the department, marketing practice requires a high level of collaboration between different departments. Figure 7 illustrates the ideal thinking behind the interviewees’ descriptions: the marketing department as the centre of the business, with a link to other departments (the ones in figure 6 are just examples based on departments mentioned in the interviews).



Figure 7 - Structure of marketing beyond the marketing department

The marketing structure is defined by how the organization shapes and promotes market orientation, i.e., the results of this research show that there are marketing activities, actors and even decision-makers outside of the marketing department. Therefore, marketing can sit exclusively within the responsibility of a department, within the responsibility of a person, or it can be shared between different units. In the illustrated structure (figure 7), the marketing department, or the marketing decision-maker functions as the engine for market orientation – it performs the role of marketing, promoting, and assuring market orientation throughout the whole organization.

However, market orientation doesn't have to be a one-way relationship (i.e., it is promoted by the marketing department/ decision-maker but can also be built from another department). For example, one of the respondents explained that he gets insights from sales and uses those insights to work on marketing strategy. In a sense, marketing is both centralized and decentralized throughout the organization. And based on the respondents' perspectives, it should be present throughout the organization – it should work as an ecosystem of market orientation. The process of creating such an ecosystem is stated in the evolution of structural marketing (figure 8).



Figure 8 - Organizational structure, adapted from Kirova et al. (2017)

Organizations that are already organized in business units are closer to the reality of a market-oriented structure (Kirova et al., 2017). This is a structure that was most



common in large organizations, but it forces decision-makers to think about marketing across the organization but also per each specific unit or brand. Some of the participating large and medium organizations promoted market orientation through a structure centred on brand management. They divide their organization through brands and attribute market orientation, strategic and tactical responsibilities to the brand managers. These then report to a marketing decision-maker, such as a director, that oversees the whole business.

The structure of marketing is influenced by how the decision-makers view the role of marketing in the organization. However, the responsibilities assigned to marketing define how the role of marketing is put to practice and how the marketing structure operates. The following topic of discussion addresses an issue in marketing functions.

4.3. MARKETING FUNCTIONS SKEW TOWARDS COMMUNICATION

In terms of marketing functions, all respondents shared two characteristics: all of them mentioned the same marketing functions identified in the literature review (i.e., all functions were related to literature and most of them were shared between respondents); but also, all the respondents only practised part – a majority part – of the functions they mentioned. Table 12 shows how the functions from the interviews can be linked to the group of functions identified in the literature review.

Functions from the literature review	Functions from the interviews
Marketing mix management	Product or service management
	Pricing (not in marketing practice)
	Marketing communications

	Content management
Internal relationships	Internal marketing and communication
	Commercial support
Strategy development	
External relationships	Customer and supplier relationships
	Outsourcing of marketing activities
Market intelligence	
Marketing performance	Team management and performance

Table 12 - Link between groups of functions from literature and respondents

Even though all functions that came up in the interviews can be linked to the literature review, there is one group of functions that can be considered further under reflection: marketing mix management. There were mentions to product management and communication management. And even though the respondents didn't mention distribution management directly, they described activities related to this function, such as "online store" or "customer relationships" (i.e., in the case of this interviewee the referred customers are retailers, therefore the relationships are related to the distribution channel).

However, there was one P of the marketing mix management missing: pricing. The interviewees would either not mention it or explain that this is not the responsibility of the marketing department or marketing decision-maker. This aspect is in line with the literature review, as it was stated that pricing decisions are increasingly distant from the marketing responsibilities (Homburg et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2011).

But the most common characteristic is that communication management seems to not only overtake the other Ps within the marketing mix but also all the other marketing functions of most of the respondents' organizations. Furthermore, it affects not only the functions, but also the structure (e.g., Head of Marketing and Communications, with a structure focused on content management, online advertising,

or other communication activities), and even the role of marketing within the organization – through communication, marketing plays a much more tactical role. This phenomenon was also covered in the literature review, as promotion is disproportionately the function commonly assigned to the marketing manager (Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010).

Additionally, in the past years the marketing department has lost influence on the company's strategy and decision-making (Homburg et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2011). In some of the participating large organizations, the conflict between the strategic and tactical role of marketing was solved by having two departments or teams with different responsibilities, called strategic marketing and operational marketing (see figure 9). The first is commonly closer to the board of directors and was responsible for overseeing the strategy of the business. They also support the operational marketing teams in terms of market intelligence, which suggest they are also responsible for guaranteeing market orientation. As for operational marketing, they manage communications and are closer to sales.



Figure 9 - Strategic and operational marketing activities, adapted from Kirova et al. (2017)

Understandably, large organizations divide marketing into strategic and operational when acting in various market segments and geographics. However, dividing functions in this manner may raise concerns. On the one hand, the already difficult dynamic between departments worsens (Kirova et al., 2017). On the other hand, it is questionable if the actors in strategic marketing are marketers or practitioners from other fields, which indicates that marketing is losing its role in strategic marketing management (Homburg et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2011). And if that is happening, as literature suggests, then an even more concerning issue arises: will strategy, and consequently tactics, lose their market orientation? Will they become or continue to be product, customer, price, or sales oriented?

When discussing the future of marketing, practitioners show a tactical thinking, biased towards communication and especially digital communication functions (Contreras et al., 2016; Gök & Hacıoglu, 2010; Ritson, 2017). In parallel, respondents mentioned that communication and digital was a majority part of their responsibilities. The abovementioned tactical thinking, increasingly centred on communication and digital, is probably the biggest short-term concern for marketing practice – when responsibilities shift towards digital and technology, is it possible that the organizational orientation could also shift towards the same? If so, that may not only be worrying for marketing teams, but the whole organization.

5. CONCLUSION

The common problems of marketing practice addressed in this thesis were the tactical bias and the loss of the strategic role in organizations. These problems can be traced back to the divide between marketing practice and marketing thought (Foltean, 2019; Kumar, 2017; Lilien et al., 2002; Mason et al., 2015; Webster, 1992).

The findings of this research show that there is a diversity of viewpoints when it comes to marketing, but even the decision-makers thinking is bounded by the abovementioned problems and lack of clarity. However, this research also shows that there is a unifying idea of the role of marketing, which can provide an understanding of how to 'market-ing', thus bringing theoretical and practical implications to the field.

Market orientation is a topic already covered in the literature (Merlo & Auh, 2009; Moorman & Rust, 1999; Oliveira & Luce, 2020; Wirtz et al., 2014). However, it has lost its' academic popularity in recent years, even though it is increasingly popular amongst practitioners (Jedidi et al., 2021). The findings of this research propose that market orientation has a crucial role in understanding and clarifying the marketing discipline, providing a common ground to marketing thought and marketing practice.

This research presents market orientation as the role of marketing, which can affect organizational culture, strategy, and tactics (Deshpande, 1999), thus being a key aspect for decision-makers, marketing teams and organizations. Additionally, it expands on how market orientation involves and affects the structure and functions of marketing teams and organizations. That is, if a team or organization is highly market-oriented, their structure must work as an ecosystem where the marketing department/ decision-maker promotes market orientation and guides the organization on actively

acquiring market insights and acting on those through their strategy and tactics. To effectively respond to the needs and trends of the market, the marketing functions must reflect the corporate ecosystem by assuring the management of market intelligence, strategy development and respective marketing mix – as presented by this research, a few medium and large companies followed this management practice by resorting to brand management.

The findings of this research raise important topics of discussion. Firstly, it was suggested that marketing decision-makers should be responsible for actively promoting and managing market orientation. Are they the best actors in the organization to do it? If so, should market teams and departments be restructured?

Secondly, it was proposed that a strategy must be a market-oriented strategy, given that market orientation surrounds and affects strategy. Therefore, if marketing orientation becomes a priority to organizations, can marketing regain/ maintain its role in strategic planning? Is the division between strategic marketing and operational marketing an effective way to structure the strategic functions?

Finally, market orientation is addressed as the role that marketing has in organizations. However, there are very few studies on how an organization can develop market orientation (Kanagal, 2017; Kumar, 2017). Therefore, it is relevant to further study how market orientation can be developed and promoted, but not only at an organizational level. It is implied that a market-oriented decision-maker is a better marketer. If so, how can we apply the learnings of market orientation to individuals and their marketing practices (i.e., how does one become more market-oriented)?

Limitations and future research

The findings of this research are limited due to its' exploratory and inductive nature. However, the general concepts presented offer a base for future research. It is relevant to continue addressing marketing practice and follow-up market orientation as the role of marketing. Table 13 presents suggestions for future research.

Research topic	Suggestion for future research
Market orientation	<p>What is marketing? Explore market orientation in the context of marketing thought</p> <p>Study the relation between market orientation and business performance (i.e., impact on market share, sales and/or financial results)</p>
Marketing strategy	Explore the role of marketing in strategic planning: are strategies market-oriented?
Organizational structure	Study the relation between different structures and marketing performance - how to create a structure that effectively promotes market orientation and its' impact in market performance
Marketing functions	<p>Explore the growth of communication and digital within the marketing mix, addressing why it is happening and what impact it has in organizations</p> <p>Analyse the main functions present in marketing teams (e.g., designers, copywriters, brand managers) and their role to the organization</p> <p>Explore the relation between strategic and operational marketing - what functions fit in each, what are its' dynamics and how both contribute to the organization</p>

Table 13 - Suggestions for future research, by field of study

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APPENDIX

The following scripts were used in the semi-structured interviews for each research phases.

Phase 1 (exploratory) with marketing experts

1. What is the current state of marketing in the labour market and academia?
2. What is the role of marketing in commercial organizations?
3. If different, what do you believe should be the role of marketing in your organization?

Phase 2 (research questions 2 and 3) with marketing decision-makers

1. How is marketing structured in your organization? Are marketing activities centralized in a department, decentralized in different business units or is the responsibility of a sole actor?
2. What functions are attributed to marketing in your department/ organization?
Are these functions shared with any other department or outsourced?

Phase 3 (research question 1) with marketing decision-makers

1. What is marketing?
2. What is the role of marketing in your organization?
3. If different, what do you believe should be the role of marketing in your organization?