Title: *Towards the postmodern future of Marketing*

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Towards the postmodern future of Marketing

Since “postmodernism” has begun to spread among academics as a new philosophical and scientific concept, management theory has also witnessed, though with different tones in some of its components, a debate concerning a new interpretation of issues as well as of the discipline. This debate offers new horizons to the academics and could bring about some interesting developments as those experienced in other disciplinary fields.

With this work, we try to interpret the epistemology of marketing, a specific part of management theory, by conducting an analysis of the literature as it has developed so far and by constantly creating links between the level of philosophical elaboration and that of marketing research.

The analysis carried out in the next pages will highlight how the extreme finalisation of marketing has partly diverted the researchers’ attention from the theory and focused it mainly on the method: a distorted mechanism was created which guaranteed the scientific nature of the discipline by using scientific methods considered universal and immutable. The focus on the method, derived from the need to make marketing a discipline with an academic status, has created an increasingly marked distinction between the marketing literature aimed at management and that aimed at the academic community. Whilst the former tends to stress the managerial implications of the contribution (they are therefore operative and tangible implications), the latter mainly insists on the adoption of a scientific method which, in very complex contexts, is often coupled with an excessive specialisation, though supported by a sophisticated modelling.

In an extreme hypothesis, the adoption of postmodernism could therefore result in a considerably important criticism of the “scientific nature” of marketing as an investigative field, at least in the sense so far accepted (Brown, 1998). Such criticism, far from threatening the existence of marketing, could nevertheless give rise to a revolutionary rethinking of the discipline. As a matter of fact, the postmodern thought highlights the role of the experience in the construction of theory. Marketing, changing its face, loses the aura of science and becomes a body of knowledge created by the individual for the individual. Both the researcher and the discipline are now faced with a very risky and at the same time challenging task.

The removal of any reference to the method’s objectivity – or pseudo-objectivity – from the frame of reference the researcher uses to evaluate any research, implies the removal of any kind of standardised and external support from the research activity. The researcher, thus deprived of any adherence to a standard, is faced with a risky challenge. As a matter of fact, adherence to a method, to its “scientific nature”, to its rigour, has traditionally constituted a safety net for the researcher: the respect for standardised channels, shared by the whole academic community, provided with a guarantee for the quality of its work and its acceptance among the public of reference. However, such safety net would also become, at the same time, the cage of the researcher who was not allowed to leave without being condemned to the deprivation of the academic status.

Instead, embracing postmodernism completely means leaving any net or cage, which implies much greater risks for the researcher but also means freedom: freedom from every scheme, from every dichotomy even from the choice between true or false and allows the researcher to make the experiences s/he chooses, and how to make it.

There is, therefore, only one criterion to evaluate research. It is the enrichment that the research experiences, and not only that, witnessed by the researcher, brings to the knowledge of the individual and of the community. It is clear that the process of creation of knowledge is endless and unstoppable as the more the individual (and the community) is enriched, and therefore learns, the more he realises his/her lack of knowledge. Knowledge “calls” knowledge.