

THE CHALLENGES OF DISSEMINATING CONSTRUCTIVIST MARKET STUDIES IN BRAZIL: A POSITION PAPER PRESENTING STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES

Desafios da disseminação dos estudos de mercado construtivistas no Brasil: Um position paper apresentando estratégias para superar os obstáculos

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ABSTRACT

The position paper addresses the challenges to the dissemination of Constructivist Market Studies (CMS) in Brazil, particularly concerning study, adoption in research, and postgraduate teaching, as well as gives suggestions to overcome such challenges.

RESUMO

Position paper que aborda desafios para a disseminação de Estudos de Mercado Construtivistas (EMC) no Brasil, particularmente no que se relaciona ao estudo, adoção em pesquisas, e ensino na pós-graduação, bem como faz sugestão para superar tais desafios.

Keywords: Constructivist market studies. Brazil. Academic challenges. Marketing.

Palavras-chave: Estudos de mercado construtivistas. Brasil. Desafios acadêmicos. Marketing.

In the last two decades, constructivist market studies (CMS) has emerged in academia and academic journals. It is generally accepted that CMS adopts theoretical contributions from Economic Sociology, Science and Technology Studies, Actor-Network Theory, Economic Anthropology, Organization Studies, and Marketing Management. It has experienced rapid growth, particularly in Europe. However, CMS seems to face a greater challenge in Brazil, especially when it comes to being adopted by marketing researchers. In this position paper, I aim to address this issue and offer insight and a suggestion.

There are three possible reasons why there is difficulty in understanding and adopting CMS:

- The lack of publications that clearly point out assumptions, theoretical basis, fundamental

concepts, and categories of analysis, which can be used as a kind of synthesis and starting point on the subject, and that have, as far as possible, a more discursive style, even didactic;

- Difficulties in translation, transposition, appropriation, and conceptual and analytical use of this perspective in emerging countries;
- The ongoing attempt to overlap market and consumer studies, mainly between market studies from a constructivist perspective, and consumer studies from a cultural perspective, branded as Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), a trend that seems to define a theoretical and conceptual intersection for what has been called market system dynamics.

Regarding the first reason, very little literature deals with market studies from a constructivist perspective. This paper references works that have a thematic outline with convergent chapters. However, there is no clear concern about demarcation or contextualization of the theoretical perspective of CMS (MacKenzie, Muniesa, & Siu, 2007; Araujo, Kjellberg, & Finch, 2010; Cochoy, Deville, & McFall, 2017). I am not arguing for the launch of a “dressage manual” or “lifeline,” but rather a work that could be used as a reference for those discovering the field. There are several examples of such introductory books in other disciplines, such as the one by Swedberg (2003).

Something simple and linked to the first reason concerns the naming of the field, as it may generate misunderstandings. Scholars in Brazil refer to the theoretical perspective as Constructivist Market Studies (CMS), whereas others refer to it as Market Constructivist Studies (MCS). Leme & Rezende (2018) called it CMS in an article published in *RIMAR-Revista Interdisciplinar de Marketing*. In a recent article published in the *Journal of Cultural Economy*, Nilsson (2020) also referred to it as CMS. For some time, I referred to the perspective as MCS, which used to raise questions in academic debates. I currently use CMS as a nomenclature.

There are two features concerning the second reason. The first is related to a theoretical and conceptual order, and the second to an empirical order. In the first case, the difficulty in dealing with the concept is quite clear. This likely originates from articles published in English by European and non-European authors. There is thus an absence of conceptual unity in the elaboration of theoretical texts, as well as in the elaboration of empirical and analytical texts. Expressly, both in the text of the basic theory, as well as in the text of the results and discussion from the published articles, there is no conformity in the conceptual treatment.

In an article published in the *Journal of Cultural Economy*, for instance, Webb & Hawkey (2017) use several articles and books as theoretical sources. This includes scholars such as Luis Araujo, Hans Kjellberg, and Franck Cochoy. However, Webb & Hawkey (2017) work with the concept of assemble. They use a similar approach to the one adopted by Robin Canniford and DomenBajde in their book *Assembling Consumption: researching actors, networks and markets* (Canniford & Bajde, 2016).

This situation repeatedly confronts one with the lack of conceptual uniqueness. I try to illustrate this situation using eight concepts that I have found in the texts I have read. I take great care to understand and use them properly. This concern is even greater in my attempt to clarify them for my students. Sometimes they seem to get closer, and sometimes they seem to overlap in the way they are used in the articles I read:

- **construction**, for example: “constructivist market studies perspective”;
- **make**, for example: “market-making”;
- **shape**, for example: “shaping market”;
- **design**, for example: “market design”;
- **agencement**, for example: “market-agencements”;
- **assemble**, for example: “assembling markets, assembling consumption”;
- **assemblage**, for example: “assemblage of a market”; and
- **agencing**, for example: “market agencing.”

I often have the impression that a – d and e – h are employed relatively similarly and have almost the same meaning. However, on other occasions, I have noticed differences, which may be related to issues of an ontological and epistemological nature, or taxonomy-related problems in market studies. Some

are linked to the first published articles or to articles that have first advanced a constructivist perspective in market studies (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006; Araujo, 2007). Others may be linked to the influence that Michel Callon previously had on the field (Callon, 2016). Several influences include Science and Technology Studies, Actor-Network Theory, Economic Sociology, Economic Anthropology, and Organization Studies. In addition, it seems clear that they have a strong relationship with the concerns and initial studies of the *Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group* (IMP).

There is still a back-and-forth of approaches in CMS. It is interesting to observe how certain concepts receive attention and centrality in the field. This is the case in the concepts of performativity and marketization. Although the concept of performativity has been used for some time (Hagberg & Kjellberg, 2010), it has received much more attention recently, as well as the concept of marketization (Mason & Araujo, 2020; Dolbec, Castilhos, Fonseca, & Trez, 2021).

But the point that I consider important about this last remark and that relates to the second reason I referred to earlier is that it highlights what authors call performativity theory. This theory has considerable influence in different fields of knowledge (Butler, 1988; Butler, 2015) and perhaps has been overlooked in market studies. More than that, it is a theory that can be seen as a competing theory of the Actor-Network Theory. Studies that approach performance from a theoretical point of view are not necessarily celebrated in market studies under a constructivist perspective. This is certainly the case with the writings of Patrik Aspers, who does not seem to receive the attention he should have (Aspers, 2007).

I began reading market studies from a constructivist perspective in 2010. None of the studies that were published in mainstream journals were about the market reality of an emerging country as an empirical reference. There is no theoretical

production related to the construction of markets in emerging countries in mainstream journals. The only studies I have seen that have focused on Brazil, for example, were limited to the studies presented within the scope of the *Interdisciplinary Market Studies Workshop*. More recently, in an apparent intersection with consumption, some studies have been published in *Consumption Markets & Culture*, but I will return to that later.

The limited condition in seeing market studies from a constructivist perspective reflects the reality in which we live. It greatly contributes to the difficulty in understanding these studies: what they are, how they are developed, what theories they use, which fundamental concepts they use, where lies their relevance, which they apply to, what methodological procedures usually adopt, what they dialogue with, why is relevant that they are developed in graduate programs of business administration, what editorial potential they have.

Regarding the third reason, the theoretical and conceptual intersection between market studies from a constructivist perspective and consumer studies from a cultural perspective may make it even more difficult to understand and use CMS. For example, in Brazil, academics who work in consumer studies are not exactly close to market studies with a constructivist perspective. I have observed this in the academic events in which I have been participating, and it is what I have perceived in articles published in Brazilian journals such as *RAC - Revista de Administração Contemporânea* and *RAE - Revista de Administração de Empresas*, and also in international journals such as *Consumption Markets & Culture* and the *Journal of Marketing Management*.

There is a growing scholarly community linked to CCT in Brazil. Most of the studies published by this community (who are trying to make an intersection between consumer culture and the market) seem to be based on the theoretical perspective of *Market Systems*

Dynamics (Giesler & Fischer, 2017). Although some of those studies have used Actor-Network Theory and theories linked to Organizational Studies, the use of the market as a fundamental category of analysis does not necessarily include basic assumptions from CMS. Nevertheless, such studies use the idea of construction and market-making. It is reasonable to assume that this situation can make understanding which epistemology and ontology have been taken for accomplishing those studies harder.

Apparently, an attempt to bring CCT and CMS closer was carried out by authors linked to both perspectives. This seems to be the case with two publications: a chapter in *The Sage Handbook of Consumer Culture*, written by Franck Cochoy and Alexandre Mallard (Cochoy & Mallard, 2018), and an article in *Consumption Markets & Culture*, written by Mikkel Nøjgaard and Domen Bajde (Nøjgaard & Bajde, 2021). The possibility of intersection is something that catches my attention since I have an interest in CCT. However, it is something we need to understand better. Both perspectives state that markets are complex social systems and that actors not only shape the markets but are also shaped by the market (Giesler & Fischer, 2017; Harrison & Kjellberg, 2016).

There may be a fourth reason that can help explain the difficulties of understanding CMS in Brazil. This concerns the offer of courses in postgraduate programs directly dealing with CMS. It is a huge challenge, mainly because the course is not a mainstream one. Besides, the literature is not so simple to read at first sight. A CMS course is expected to debate the market in a way that students are not used to in business administration graduate programs. Nor are they expected to discuss consumption without consumers at the center of the debate. Perhaps it seems strange at the beginning and necessitates extra efforts by professors and students.

Despite the difficulties that I have pointed out here, the CMS perspective is fascinating, mainly for

approaching marketing and markets in a new and less naïve way. What I miss most is a kind of textbook or handbook that could provide a combined perspective, maybe a kind of synthesis, of what CMS is. It would be a worthy starting point for a graduate course. Researchers in New Zealand published a book that tries to offer insight into market shaping (Nenonen & Storbacka, 2018). However, the book's somewhat prescriptive approach contradicts CMS's more descriptive and analytical perspective. Conversely, considering the interface between CMS and CCT, Fernandez & Figueiredo (2020) recently organized a book. Yet, it is not appropriate for graduate courses, as it is merely a collection of articles already published in the journal *Consumption, Markets & Culture*.

In conclusion, I offer a suggestion. Brazilian scholars interested in CMS should organize a small-scale academic workshop (Geiger & Kjellberg, 2016) for debating issues, sharing experiences, and trying to advance the understanding of CMS. This could be an excellent opportunity for building a community of practice (Tähtinen, Ryan & Holmlund, 2016) related to CMS. Since there is already a track related to CMS in the academic meeting of the National Association of Postgraduation and Research in Administration (ANPAD) —the most important academic meeting in the field of business administration in Latin America — such an attempt is truly possible.

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