

Exploring Scholarly Debates on the Disciplinary Nature of Marketing: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Marketing has long been debated as either an art or a science. This debate has intensified with the rise of digital marketing, big data, and technological innovations, which increasingly require evidence-based decision-making alongside creative expression. The aim of this study was to explore scholarly debates on the disciplinary nature of marketing and examine how contemporary practices integrate artistic and scientific elements. A structured literature review was conducted, covering peer-reviewed articles published between 2007 and 2025. Relevant studies were identified through systematic searches in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using keywords including "marketing art," "marketing science," "creative strategy," and "data-driven marketing." Inclusion criteria focused on studies that discussed marketing's disciplinary identity, methodologies, or practice implications, while duplicates, non-peer-reviewed sources, and off-topic studies were excluded. The review synthesised findings through thematic analysis to identify convergent and divergent scholarly perspectives. Results reveal that marketing operates as a hybrid discipline: artistic elements such as storytelling, emotional appeal, and visual design coexist with scientific practices including data analytics, testing, and performance measurement. The integration of these dimensions enables marketers to create strategies that are both engaging and evidence-based. The study concludes that marketing's interdisciplinary nature requires professionals and educators to balance creative and analytical competencies. A key recommendation is that educational institutions and industry practitioners adopt integrative approaches that equip marketers with both artistic intuition and scientific rigor, ensuring effective engagement in a rapidly evolving, technology-driven marketing landscape.

Keywords: Marketing, Marketing as Science, Marketing as Art, Marketing Eclecticism, Interdisciplinary Marketing.

Introduction

The scholarly debate over whether marketing is primarily a science or an art discipline has been ongoing and multifaceted, reflecting the complex nature of the field itself. This debate stems from the eclectic nature of marketing, which has borrowed substantially from several arts and science-based disciplines to explain its phenomena (Oraedu & Nnabuko, 2019). By drawing from several disciplines, marketing has emerged to be a dynamically controversial

field in itself sparking ongoing debates among scholars on the exact origin of marketing. Even the meaning of marketing itself has undergone lengthy debates among scholars who have either conceived it as an act of selling (Borden, 1964; McCarthy, 1960), a promotional activity (Stanton, 2020; Kitchen, 2005), or an economic/transactional process (Baker, 2016; Hunt, 2018). These scholarly arguments on the meaning of marketing have often coexisted with the debates surrounding the origin of the marketing discipline. On one end of the spectrum, advocates of the scientific perspective assert that marketing is deeply rooted in data analysis, metrics, and empirical evidence (Rosário *et al.*, 2021). From this viewpoint, successful marketing strategies are meticulously crafted through rigorous research, experimentation, and the application of statistical models. Market segmentation, consumer behaviour analysis, and the use of sophisticated analytics tools are emphasized as essential components in understanding and predicting consumer preferences and trends. Also, proponents of the scientific approach argue that marketing effectiveness can be quantitatively measured through key performance indicators (KPIs), such as return on investment (ROI) and customer lifetime value (CLV), thereby providing a systematic framework for assessing and optimizing marketing campaigns (Nelson *et al.*, 2020; Grewal *et al.*, 2020). On the other end of the spectrum, advocates of the artistic perspective contend that marketing is inherently creative and subjective, akin to an art form (Estes *et al.*, 2018). They argue that successful marketing campaigns are driven by innovation, imagination, and the ability to evoke emotional connections with consumers.

From this viewpoint, they suggest that marketers are akin to storytellers, leveraging their understanding of human psychology and cultural nuances to craft compelling narratives and experiences that resonate with their target audience (Loose, 2015). As such, creativity, intuition, and the capacity to think outside the box are highlighted as crucial attributes for developing impactful marketing strategies. Moreover, proponents of the artistic approach emphasize the importance of brand identity, aesthetics, and brand storytelling in fostering brand loyalty and differentiation in a crowded marketplace (Sheinkop, 2016; Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018). The prevalence of these lengthy debates has led to several negative outcomes that are hindering the advancement and effectiveness of marketing practices. According to Arthmann and Li (2017), one major negative outcome of these debates is the polarization of viewpoints within the marketing community. When scholars and practitioners strongly advocate for either the artistic or scientific nature of marketing, it creates division and impedes collaboration. Rather than embracing the potential synergy between creativity and data-driven decision-making, these debates often result in entrenched positions that stifle innovation and progress. Another negative outcome of these lengthy scholarly debates is the oversimplification of marketing processes (Peter *et al.*, 2015). This is because when viewed strictly as an art, marketing may be perceived as subjective and reliant solely on creative inspiration, neglecting the importance of empirical evidence and analytical rigor. Conversely, a purely scientific approach to marketing may prioritize quantitative data and experimental methods while disregarding the fundamentals of consumer behaviour and market dynamics. This dichotomous thinking

overlooks the complexity of marketing phenomena and can lead to incomplete or flawed strategies. Consequently, there is need for an in-depth exploration of the two schools of thought to determine which holds credibility in modern-day interpretations of the marketing discipline. The findings of such investigations will contribute to a clearer understanding of marketing as a discipline, informing practitioners, scholars, and educators alike on the most effective strategies for achieving marketing objectives in contemporary markets. The purpose of this study therefore was to explore scholarly literature to determine whether marketing is an art or science-based discipline especially with the dynamic environmental changes prevalent in contemporary marketing.

Problem Statement

Despite decades of scholarly discourse, the disciplinary nature of marketing remains unresolved, with persistent disagreement over whether marketing should be regarded primarily as an art or as a science. While some scholars emphasize the creative dimensions of marketing (such as storytelling, emotional engagement, and brand expression) (Schembri, 2019; Gopnik, 2017; Mader, 2021; Maynard, 2017), others stress its analytical and empirical foundations, including data analysis, marketing research, and performance measurement (Dias et al., 2023; Beach et al., 2024; Appel et al., 2020). These divergent viewpoints reflect the eclectic origins of marketing as a discipline that draws from multiple fields such as economics, psychology, sociology, and communication studies. However, much of the existing literature tends to address these perspectives separately, often presenting descriptive arguments that favour either the artistic or the scientific orientation of marketing. As a result, the scholarly conversation surrounding the disciplinary identity of marketing remains fragmented, producing limited conceptual clarity regarding how these perspectives interact within contemporary marketing practice. This lack of systematic synthesis has made it difficult to establish a coherent understanding of marketing's disciplinary foundations, particularly in an era where technological advancement, digital platforms, and data-driven decision-making increasingly intersect with creative communication strategies.

The absence of a structured integration of these competing viewpoints presents both theoretical and practical challenges for the marketing discipline. Without a clear analytical consolidation of the art–science debate, scholars and educators may struggle to define the core competencies that should underpin marketing education. In the same way, practitioners may face uncertainty regarding the balance between analytical capabilities and creative expertise required for effective marketing practice. Furthermore, although several studies have explored elements of creativity, consumer psychology, data analytics, and marketing research within the discipline, relatively few studies have systematically synthesised these arguments to clarify the broader disciplinary nature of marketing. This gap highlights the need for a structured review of existing scholarship that organises and evaluates the diverse perspectives within the debate in order to provide a clearer conceptual understanding of marketing's evolving identity. Against this backdrop, this

study conducted a structured literature review to examine scholarly debates on the disciplinary nature of marketing. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. examine the conceptualisations of marketing within existing scholarship;
- ii. analyse scholarly arguments that position marketing as an artistic discipline;
- iii. evaluate scholarly perspectives that frame marketing as a scientific discipline;
- iv. synthesise these viewpoints to determine the extent to which marketing can be understood as an interdisciplinary field that integrates both artistic and scientific elements.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the theory of Scientific Realism propounded by Bhaskar (1975) and the theory of Creative Cognition propounded by Finke et al. (1992). The theory of Scientific Realism was developed to explain how scientific inquiry can uncover the real structures and mechanisms that underlie observable phenomena. Its basic premise is that reliable knowledge is generated through systematic investigation, empirical testing, and evidence-based reasoning (Bhaskar, 1975). In essence, the theory explains that disciplines gain credibility and legitimacy when they apply structured methods to understand and predict outcomes. In the context of this study, the relevance of this theory is that it provides a lens to examine the arguments that marketing can be understood as a science. This implies that by applying scientific principles such as research methodology, analytics, and evidence-based decision-making, marketing scholars can justify the scientific dimension of the discipline and evaluate how empirical approaches shape marketing knowledge.

Similarly, the theory of Creative Cognition was developed to explain the cognitive processes that drive creativity and innovative thinking. Its basic premise is that creativity emerges from mental operations such as idea combination, conceptual expansion, and associative thinking, which enable individuals to generate novel and valuable solutions (Finke et al., 1992). In essence, the theory explains that creative thinking follows structured processes that can be studied, understood, and applied, particularly in fields that rely on innovation and expression. In the context of this study, the relevance of this theory is that it provides a framework to explore marketing as an art, highlighting how creative processes contribute to brand storytelling, campaign design, and consumer experience innovation. This implies that the artistic dimension of marketing is not arbitrary but guided by cognitive structures that allow for originality and value creation, complementing the scientific perspective to reveal marketing as a truly interdisciplinary field.

Conceptualizations of Marketing

Marketing has been conceptualized in ways that reflect both agreement and divergence among scholars regarding its scope, purpose, and processes. Onyeike et al. (2015) describe marketing as a comprehensive set of business activities aimed at building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with customers and other stakeholders through planning,

production, pricing, promotion, and distribution within a dynamic global environment. This relational and strategic emphasis aligns with Anyanwu (2000), who defines marketing as business activities designed to anticipate demand and ensure goods and services satisfy consumers while generating organizational profit. Similarly, Ebitu (2012) highlights marketing as a process that identifies needs, creates and delivers superior value, and fosters mutually beneficial stakeholder relationships, reinforcing the centrality of relational and value-focused processes noted by Onyeike et al. (2015) and Anyanwu (2000). These definitions converge on the view that marketing is a deliberate and organized activity that integrates strategic planning with stakeholder engagement, positioning it as both purposeful and outcome-oriented.

However, distinctions emerge regarding the broader purpose and ethical dimensions of marketing. The American Marketing Association (2017) situates marketing not merely as a transactional activity but as a process that creates value for customers, organizations, and society, emphasizing marketing's role in societal welfare and well-being. Kotler (2017) similarly frames marketing as "the art of creating genuine customer value," stressing the humanistic and ethical dimensions that enhance customer well-being rather than simply promoting products. In contrast, Jobber and Ellis-Chadwick (2012) emphasize systematic processes, efficiency, and competitive advantage as central to satisfying customer needs and achieving business growth. While Kotler (2017) and the AMA (2017) foreground marketing's creative, customer-centric, and socially responsible aspects, Jobber and Ellis-Chadwick (2012) present it as a structured, mechanistic process, prioritizing managerial control and measurable outcomes. Synthesizing these perspectives, marketing emerges as a multidimensional discipline that integrates both artistic and scientific elements. The literature converges on the importance of value creation and relationship building (Onyeike et al., 2015; Anyanwu, 2000; Ebitu, 2012; AMA, 2017), yet diverges in emphasis on empathy, creativity, and societal impact versus efficiency, prediction, and operational rigor (Kotler, 2017; Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012). This synthesis highlights marketing as a field that simultaneously demands creativity, ethical consideration, and human understanding alongside structured processes, analytical assessment, and strategic execution, positioning it as an interdisciplinary practice focused on the pursuit of organizational and societal value.

What Qualifies a Discipline as Art?

Art is widely recognised as an expression of human creativity, skill, and imagination that extends across multiple mediums, from visual forms like painting and sculpture to music, literature, theatre, and dance (Adams, 2018; Liao, 2016). Across the literature, there is general agreement that art functions as a mode of communication, enabling individuals and cultures to convey ideas, emotions, and experiences, whether personal, societal, or universal. Adams (2018) and Liao (2016) both emphasise the capacity of art to inspire reflection and innovation, highlighting its role in challenging perceptions and fostering connection. Wolff (2021) and Mader (2021) build on this view by identifying creativity as a central criterion for qualifying a discipline as artistic, arguing that both individualistic

expression and innovation are required for a field to embody art. Spronck (2020) complements this perspective by stressing the dialogic dimension of art, where engagement between creator and audience produces shared understanding and societal reflection. Collectively, these scholars converge on the idea that art is not simply about aesthetic output but also about the processes of meaning-making, emotional resonance, and cultural interpretation that arise through creative practice. At the same time, differences emerge in emphasis: whereas Wolff (2021) foregrounds methodological creativity and outcome-oriented innovation, Spronck (2020) focuses on relational and societal impact, and Liao (2016) situates art within broader philosophical and cognitive contexts. These distinctions underscore that artistic disciplines cannot be narrowly defined by either output or process alone but are best understood as systems where creativity, engagement, and interpretive meaning coalesce.

Despite this convergence, scholars note tensions that distinguish art from scientific or empirical disciplines, particularly regarding methodology and interpretive openness. Haseman (2006) and Mader (2021) emphasise the non-linear, subjective, and exploratory nature of artistic inquiry, contrasting it with the structured, data-driven approaches typical of science. Leavy (2020) and Lilja (2019) highlight how artistic methods embrace experimentation, interdisciplinarity, and cultural critique, allowing multiple interpretations and continual evolution of understanding. Morphy (2020) adds that the institutional and social recognition of an art form (including its integration into education and public discourse) is a critical factor in establishing a discipline's artistic legitimacy. Paul and Criado (2020) further reinforce the notion that art requires a blend of creativity, cultural reflection, and audience interaction, while Sansi (2020) emphasises the significance of ambiguity and open-ended exploration as distinguishing features. Synthesising these perspectives, it becomes evident that a discipline qualifies as artistic not only when creativity and innovation are central but also when its practices facilitate interpretive engagement, societal relevance, and interdisciplinary integration. In this light, art is simultaneously methodological, expressive, and relational: it combines the subjective exploration of human experience with broader societal and cultural impact. The literature thus positions art as a flexible and evolving domain, where methods, meaning, and audience interaction intersect to produce knowledge and value that cannot be fully captured by rigid empirical criteria, providing a conceptual benchmark for assessing whether marketing practices can be considered artistic in nature.

What Qualifies a Discipline as Science?

Science is consistently defined as a systematic and rigorous pursuit of knowledge aimed at understanding, explaining, and predicting phenomena through observation, experimentation, and analysis (Fortunato et al., 2018; McKittrick, 2020). Across the literature, there is broad agreement that objectivity, empirical testing, and adherence to structured methodologies are fundamental characteristics of scientific disciplines (Poincaré, 2022; Taber, 2019). Fortunato et al. (2018) and McKittrick (2020) emphasise the

accumulation of empirical evidence and the iterative development of theories or models as central to scientific inquiry, highlighting the role of falsifiable hypotheses and controlled experimentation in establishing robust conclusions. Taber (2019) complements this perspective by underlining the adaptability of science, where new data prompts refinement of models and theories, a process echoed by Akinolu and Tandoğan (2017) as essential for the advancement of knowledge. While the definitions converge on methodological rigour, some differences in focus emerge: Poincaré (2022) stresses formal principles of the scientific method, whereas Fortunato et al. (2018) foreground the practical application of systematic inquiry. Despite these nuances, the shared thread is that scientific disciplines rely on transparent, repeatable, and verifiable methods to ensure credibility, reproducibility, and cumulative knowledge building.

Beyond methodology, scholars highlight the cultural and epistemological dimensions that distinguish science from other disciplines. Nahavandi (2015) and Gilbert (2019) point to specialized norms, languages, and frameworks that guide inquiry, enabling consistent and interpretable knowledge generation. Kersting et al. (2024) emphasise the role of community structures, peer review, and ethical standards in maintaining objectivity and societal relevance, aligning with McComas (2017) and Allchin et al. (2018) who note that science integrates social accountability with methodological rigour. Moreover, the predictive capacity of science, as discussed by Taber (2019) and Akinolu and Tandoğan (2017), distinguishes it from descriptive or interpretive fields, enabling the anticipation of future outcomes and practical problem-solving. Collectively, these perspectives underscore that a scientific discipline is defined not only by procedural adherence and empirical validity but also by its capacity for theory evolution, reproducibility, and societal impact. While there is alignment on these core characteristics, variations in emphasis (between methodological precision, adaptability, and cultural embedding) suggest that science encompasses both procedural and contextual dimensions. Synthesising these views, it is evident that scientific disciplines maintain their legitimacy through rigorous, data-driven inquiry, ethical practice, and predictive utility, offering a benchmark against which marketing practices can be assessed for their scientific characteristics.

Methodology

This study adopts a structured literature review design to explore scholarly debates on the disciplinary nature of marketing, particularly its characterization as an art, a science, or an integration of both. A structured literature review was chosen over empirical or purely conceptual approaches because it enables a systematic, transparent, and replicable analysis of existing scholarship, ensuring that the review is comprehensive, unbiased, and critically evaluative. This approach is particularly suited to the study's aims, as it allows the identification of points of tension and convergence in the literature, the assessment of evidence strength for competing positions, and the synthesis of findings across multiple disciplinary perspectives. Unlike narrative reviews, which are often descriptive and unstructured, a structured review provides analytical rigor while maintaining the flexibility

needed to interpret complex theoretical debates. The literature was identified through searches in multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Emerald Insight. Keywords and Boolean search strings included combinations of *"marketing discipline," "marketing as art," "marketing as science," "marketing scholarly debate," "marketing theory,"* and *"interdisciplinary marketing,"* covering publications from 2007 to 2025 to ensure inclusion of contemporary perspectives. Sources were included if they explicitly addressed the conceptual, theoretical, or philosophical dimensions of marketing's disciplinary status, offered critical evaluations of the art versus science debate, or provided empirical evidence relating to marketing practice in this context. Sources were excluded if they focused solely on technical marketing tactics, narrow case studies without theoretical relevance, or non-peer-reviewed commentary.

The final selection consisted of 105 peer-reviewed articles, textbooks, and authoritative industry reports, representing a diverse range of perspectives from marketing, psychology, sociology, and the philosophy of science. The analytical approach involved thematic synthesis. First, literature was coded according to recurring themes, such as conceptualizations of marketing, artistic elements, scientific methods, and interdisciplinary integration. Next, points of tension, convergence, and divergence between scholars were identified within each theme, highlighting areas where the art versus science boundary in marketing remains contested. The synthesis then evaluated the strength of evidence supporting each position, critically examining methodological rigor, theoretical grounding, and practical relevance. Throughout, the review adhered to a structured approach, documenting the rationale for inclusion and the analytical decisions made, ensuring transparency and reproducibility. While the review is primarily conceptual, the structured methodology provides a systematic framework for evaluating and integrating scholarship, allowing the study to offer analytical insights beyond descriptive summaries and to contribute meaningfully to ongoing debates on marketing's disciplinary nature.

Analysis, Findings and Discussion

How is Marketing an Art?

The notion that marketing is artistic in nature has been espoused for several decades, especially in the face of rapidly evolving consumer preferences and the need for innovative, emotionally resonant campaigns. As markets become increasingly saturated, businesses seek creative approaches to capture attention, differentiating their brands through storytelling, aesthetics, and emotional appeal (Akimov, 2021). This perspective highlights the role of marketers as not only strategists but also artists, crafting messages and experiences that connect with audiences on a deeper, more personal level (Lee & Lee, 2024).

Storytelling

Storytelling in marketing is defined as the strategic use of narratives to convey ideas, emotions, and messages that resonate with audiences, creating immersive and emotionally

engaging brand experiences (Key, 2019). Scholars widely acknowledge that storytelling contributes to marketing's artistic dimension by integrating creativity, emotional depth, and audience connection, yet there is disagreement over the extent and nature of its artistry. Schembri (2019) emphasises that storytelling simplifies complex ideas, fosters empathy, and builds memorable brand identities, while Gopnik (2017) highlights the cognitive dimension, showing how narratives are encoded in consumers' episodic memories and influence future behaviour. These perspectives converge on the idea that storytelling is more than informational; it is an expressive, creative practice that evokes emotional and intellectual engagement. Tensions emerge when considering strategic constraints: Lee and Lee (2024) argue that storytelling's effectiveness hinges on authenticity and alignment with business objectives, whereas Akimov (2021) observes that marketers in saturated markets must balance originality with measurable outcomes, revealing a persistent conflict between artistic freedom and commercial imperatives. Mader (2021) and Woodside (2020) position storytelling as inherently artistic, enabling self-expression, cultural resonance, and community engagement, while Maynard (2007, 2017) and Martin (2012) acknowledge its creative merit but stress functional purposes such as clarity, memorability, and influence on consumer behaviour. These divergent views illustrate that storytelling operates in a contested space: it is both an art form that leverages imagination, narrative structure, and emotional nuance, and a tool subject to strategic marketing considerations. Ultimately, storytelling exemplifies the artistic dimension of marketing by fostering emotional and aesthetic engagement, while the tension between creative expression and goal-oriented outcomes underscores the complex interplay between art and science in contemporary marketing practice.

Creativity and Innovation

Creativity in marketing is defined as the generation of novel and valuable ideas, while innovation refers to the practical application of these ideas to create meaningful experiences (Acar et al., 2019), positioning both concepts as central to marketing's artistic dimension. Scholars agree that creativity provides the imaginative foundation, inspiring fresh strategies and aesthetic approaches, whereas innovation operationalises these ideas, translating them into tangible experiences that resonate emotionally with audiences (Rosso, 2014; Ghosh, 2015). Gumusluoglu et al. (2017) and Soleas (2020) emphasise that this interplay allows businesses to stand out in competitive markets, linking imaginative processes to both functional success and aesthetic value. Kesting et al. (2015) and Jiang et al. (2017) further highlight that creativity transforms marketing into an art form by producing immersive, emotionally impactful experiences that engage audiences beyond transactional considerations. Scholarly tensions emerge, however, when balancing artistic expression with strategic imperatives: Akimov (2021) notes that while creativity is essential for differentiation and engagement, it must also align with measurable business objectives, revealing the contested boundary between art and science. Ackaradejruangsri et al. (2022) and Bagheri and Harrison (2020) argue that creative marketing strategies, through

storytelling, visual aesthetics, and cultural relevance, extend beyond functional outcomes to cultural and social expression, giving campaigns a distinctly artistic quality. Hon and Lui (2016) similarly contend that the emotional and societal resonance of creative campaigns positions marketing as a platform for meaning-making, where audiences derive both aesthetic pleasure and identity alignment. These perspectives collectively demonstrate that creativity and innovation operate within a dynamic tension: creativity fuels imaginative, expressive strategies (art), while innovation ensures their practical realisation (science), highlighting marketing as a discipline that navigates the intersection of artistry and functional strategy.

Visual Design

Visual design is widely recognised as a critical element in marketing's artistic dimension, yet scholars emphasise different mechanisms through which it shapes consumer perception. Lee and Lee (2024) define it as the strategic use of visual elements, such as color, shape, typography, imagery, and layout, to convey messages effectively, while Affonso and Janiszewski (2023) stress its grounding in perceptual principles, linking aesthetics to both cognitive and emotional responses. Schroeder and Borgerson (2016) highlight how visual design provides consistency across media, reinforcing brand identity and guiding engagement, whereas Akimov (2021) argues that it elevates marketing into an artistic practice by leveraging aesthetics to foster trust and memorability. Tensions emerge, however, between structured and unstructured design approaches: Affonso and Janiszewski (2023) note that symmetry and regularity reinforce functional brand perceptions, while dynamic or asymmetrical visuals support hedonic or experiential brand appeals, revealing a contested space between utilitarian messaging and artistic expression. Chen et al. (2018) further illustrates how design choices transform functional messaging into immersive visual storytelling, enabling marketers to communicate not just product benefits but also identity, values, and cultural resonance. Synthesising these perspectives, visual design in marketing operates at the intersection of art and strategy, blending creative aesthetic decisions with brand objectives, and demonstrating how artistic techniques can be systematically applied to generate emotional engagement, consumer loyalty, and meaningful brand experiences.

Emotional Appeal

Emotional appeal in marketing is widely acknowledged as a key mechanism through which the discipline demonstrates its artistic dimension. It is perceived differently by scholars. Johnson and Stewart (2017) define it as a persuasive approach aimed at evoking specific feelings to forge consumer connections, while Nagar (2020) highlights its focus on affective rather than rational engagement, producing interactions that are more memorable and impactful. Moser and Wentzel (2018) argue that emotions such as happiness, fear, nostalgia, or anger are strategically employed to leave lasting impressions, whereas McDuff et al. (2015) emphasise its role in enhancing both attention and recall, thereby influencing

loyalty and purchase behaviour. Tensions arise when considering the balance between emotional resonance and message effectiveness: Vecchiato et al. (2020) and Hamelin et al. (2017) show that consumer neuroscience confirms the unconscious processing of emotional cues, yet this can sometimes lead to impulse-driven rather than deliberative decision-making. The artistic character of emotional marketing emerges from the intricate crafting of narratives, imagery, and sound to evoke complex emotional states (Xie et al., 2015), echoing techniques found in traditional art forms (Poels & Dewitte, 2019). Cartwright et al. (2018) and Lewinski et al. (2020) further argue that by prioritising emotional engagement, marketing transcends transactional functions, becoming an experience-driven, interpretive practice. Essentially, these perspectives, emotional appeal in marketing represents a convergence of art and strategy: it blends creativity, psychological insight, and aesthetic execution to generate meaningful consumer experiences, demonstrating how artistic methods are systematically applied to influence behaviour and deepen brand-consumer relationships.

Brand Identity

Rather than functioning purely as a promotional tool, brand identity serves as the carefully constructed persona through which a company communicates its values, personality, and distinctiveness to consumers, though scholars highlight different emphases on its components and outcomes. Casidy et al. (2019) define brand identity as the unique combination of features, values, and expressions that shape how a brand sees itself and seeks to be seen, while Jain (2017) underscores both tangible elements, such as logos and color schemes, and intangible ones, like tone and personality, which together differentiate the brand from competitors. Kapferer (2020) situates brand identity as central to consumer perception, noting its role in creating lasting impressions that extend beyond functional product attributes, whereas Balmer and Grayser (2017) stress the emotional resonance achieved through coherent narratives, storytelling, and aesthetic choices. Points of contrast emerge in how scholars interpret the balance between artistic creativity and strategic intention: Hemsley-Brown et al. (2016) argue that establishing a memorable brand identity demands artistic sensibilities in aesthetics and narrative construction, whereas Ha and Perks (2021) highlight the integration of cultural symbolism and design principles to ensure strategic consistency. Carvalho and Mota (2018) further reinforce the notion that visual elements, such as colors, imagery, logos, do more than decorate; they communicate meaning, evoke emotions, and align with the brand's story, thereby transforming marketing into an aesthetic practice. Across these perspectives, it is evident that brand identity operates at the intersection of art and strategy, requiring marketers to blend creativity, cultural understanding, and design literacy to engage consumers cognitively and emotionally. Collectively, these insights suggest that through brand identity, marketing transcends mere functionality, evolving into a discipline where artistic expression and strategic design coalesce to shape enduring consumer relationships.

Adaptability

In contemporary marketing, the ability to adapt is not merely a tactical response but a strategic capability that integrates creative intuition with analytical reasoning, though scholars differ on the mechanisms and emphasis of this process. Reimann, Carvalho, and Duarte (2022) define adaptive marketing capabilities (AMC) as an organization's proficiency in reconfiguring resources rapidly and effectively to sustain performance in competitive contexts, highlighting flexibility as central to success. Papadas et al. (2019) expand on this, linking adaptability to digital transformation and global market engagement, framing it as a means for organizations to exploit opportunities in uncertain environments. While these perspectives align on the importance of responsiveness, tension arises in how adaptability is conceptualized: Hughes et al. (2018) stress the creative and intuitive dimension, comparing marketers' iterative adjustments to the experimental processes of artistic practice, whereas Akbar et al. (2020) focus on the systematic, evidence-based elements that underpin strategic decision-making. Jones and Rowley (2021) bridge these viewpoints by emphasizing that adaptive marketing is simultaneously analytical and artistic, requiring marketers to continuously reshape brand narratives in response to cultural, technological, and competitive shifts. Across these insights, adaptability emerges as a core feature of marketing that exemplifies the discipline's hybrid nature. Its practice demands the creativity and fluidity associated with art, while retaining the structured, evaluative rigor characteristic of science. This duality underscores that successful adaptability is not purely reactive; it is a deliberate, imaginative process that enables marketers to craft meaningful, resonant brand experiences while maintaining performance and relevance in dynamic markets.

Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing is defined as a strategy that immerses consumers in memorable and engaging brand experiences, often through interactive, event-based, or technology-driven engagements (Urdea & Constantin, 2021). Rather than focusing solely on traditional advertising, this approach emphasizes creating sensory and emotional connections that foster loyalty and reinforce brand identity (Rather, 2020). Scholars agree on its immersive nature, but differ in framing its artistic versus strategic dimensions. Ihtiyar et al. (2019) highlight how experiential marketing transforms consumers from passive recipients into active participants, engaging their senses and emotions to communicate brand values. Tension arises in how much emphasis is placed on creativity versus planning: Urdea et al. (2021) stress the aesthetic and emotional aspects, likening marketers' curation of experiences to the artistic creation of works that evoke specific feelings, while Carù and Cova (2020) emphasize the strategic role of aligning experiences with commercial objectives. Across these perspectives, experiential marketing demonstrates a deliberate interplay between artistry and analytical foresight, where storytelling, multisensory design, and emotional resonance coexist with measurable outcomes. This duality positions experiential marketing as a discipline where marketers navigate both intuitive creativity

and evidence-based strategy, transforming engagement from transactional communication into highly personal, memorable consumer experiences.

Interactive Engagement

Interactive engagement in marketing is defined as the dynamic, reciprocal interaction between a brand and its consumers, often facilitated by digital platforms that enable meaningful participation (Camargo & Justo, 2016). Scholars generally agree that when these interactions are designed with creativity, aesthetic appeal, and immersive elements, they take on an artistic dimension (Huang et al., 2022). However, tensions arise regarding the extent to which such interactivity qualifies as art. Some authors argue that the deliberate use of narrative storytelling, symbolic imagery, and emotionally rich multimedia constitutes intentional artistry, highlighting marketers' creative role in crafting visually and experientially compelling campaigns (Kwon & Ha, 2023). In contrast, others contend that the technological and functional imperatives inherent in digital engagement, such as data collection, algorithmic personalization, and user analytics, limit its artistic potential, framing these interactions primarily as strategic or operational tools with aesthetic overlays (Wang, 2021). This debate reflects a broader scholarly contention over whether interactive engagement is fundamentally expressive or instrumentally functional. Furthermore, scholars diverge on the role of user co-creation: while some posit that consumer participation amplifies artistic expression by introducing diverse interpretations and emotional resonance, others argue that reliance on standardized digital interfaces constrains true creativity (Huang et al., 2022; Kwon & Ha, 2023). These contrasting perspectives reveal that the artistic value of interactive engagement is neither uniform nor uncontested; rather, it emerges at the intersection of creative intention, technological facilitation, and consumer experience. In essence, marketing in this domain functions as a hybrid discipline, where artistry coexists with strategic and analytical imperatives, producing immersive, aesthetically engaging interactions that are simultaneously expressive and functional.

Human-centric Approach

Human-centric marketing is defined as a strategy that places individual consumers, their experiences, emotions, and aspirations at the center of all marketing activities, emphasizing empathy, personal relevance, and emotional resonance (Chandy et al., 2019). Scholars largely agree that this approach transforms marketing into an artistic practice by foregrounding creativity, emotional engagement, and narrative construction (Johnson & Neuhofer, 2021). However, tensions exist regarding the extent and nature of its artistic status. Some authors argue that the use of storytelling, imagery, and experiential design constitutes deliberate artistry, as campaigns can evoke emotional and aesthetic responses similar to those achieved through literature, visual arts, or performance (Li & Sun, 2022; Pine & Gilmore, 2017). In contrast, others contend that while human-centric approaches are empathetic and creative, they are often constrained by strategic business imperatives,

metrics-driven personalization, and market segmentation, which can reduce the scope for genuine artistic expression (Kim & Baker, 2018; Oliver, 2020). Further debate surrounds the role of consumer interpretation: proponents suggest that co-created experiences, where customers' values and identities shape the interaction, amplify the artistry of marketing, enabling nuanced emotional and symbolic resonance (Hollebeek & Andreassen, 2018; Swaminathan et al., 2020). Critics, however, highlight that standardization, algorithmic targeting, and performance-focused campaigns may limit the unpredictability and interpretive freedom central to traditional art forms, positioning human-centric marketing as strategically expressive rather than purely artistic (Ravasi et al., 2021). These tensions reveal that the artistic dimension of human-centric marketing is contingent upon the interplay between creative intent, empathetic insight, and the degree of freedom allowed in audience engagement. Ultimately, human-centric marketing exemplifies a hybrid space where art and commerce intersect, with artistry emerging through carefully crafted emotional experiences, narrative depth, and personalized resonance, even as it remains bounded by practical business objectives and performance metrics.

How is Marketing a Science?

Marketing is also considered in some scholarly quarters to be a scientific discipline due to its possession of certain characteristics bearing close semblance to science. These characteristics include consumer behaviour analysis, marketing research, data-driven decision making, testing and experimentation, performance measurement, optimization, among others.

Consumer Behaviour Analysis

Consumer behaviour analysis in marketing is defined as the systematic study of how individuals make purchasing decisions, including the psychological processes, motivations, and external influences that shape these choices (Dias et al., 2023). Scholars widely acknowledge that by applying empirical methods, statistical models, and controlled experimentation, consumer behaviour research strengthens marketing's claim to scientific rigor, producing data-driven insights that enhance predictability and strategic precision (Fernandes & Dias, 2024; Beach et al., 2024). Dias et al. (2023) argue that the methodological foundations of consumer behaviour analysis, such as hypothesis testing, experimentation, and model validation, align closely with traditional scientific disciplines, enabling marketers to forecast consumer responses with measurable accuracy. However, tensions arise regarding the interpretation and application of these insights: Appel et al. (2020) highlight that while quantitative methods provide objectivity, they can sometimes oversimplify complex social and emotional influences, potentially underestimating cultural and situational factors that qualitative studies capture. Chan (2019) notes that behavioural determinants like social identity, emotional fulfillment, and symbolic meaning introduce variability that challenges strict predictive modeling, creating a contested boundary between scientific precision and contextual nuance. Rosenbusch et al. (2019) further

caution that although statistical tools such as meta-regressions and funnel plots enhance validity, overreliance on numerical data can neglect experiential and interpretive aspects of consumer decision-making. Despite these debates, the convergence of empirical testing, theory-driven analysis, and cross-disciplinary methods from psychology, sociology, and economics underscores marketing's scientific credentials, demonstrating that structured consumer behaviour analysis enables both evidence-based strategy and predictive capability while revealing inherent tensions between methodological rigor and the complexity of human behaviour.

Marketing Research

Marketing research is the systematic process of gathering, recording, and analyzing data to address issues related to marketing products and services (Malhotra & Birks, 2017). It employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to understand consumer behaviour, market trends, and competitive dynamics, thereby enabling evidence-based strategic decisions (Kumar & Sharma, 2020; Creswell, 2018). Scholars widely recognize that marketing research strengthens the scientific nature of marketing by introducing methodological rigor, hypothesis testing, statistical analysis, and predictive modeling akin to practices in social and natural sciences (Morgan et al., 2019; Lilien et al., 2016). However, tensions exist regarding the balance between scientific objectivity and the contextual nuances of consumer and market dynamics: Homburg et al. (2016) argue that strict adherence to quantitative methods enhances reliability but may overlook subjective, cultural, or emotional factors that influence consumer behaviour, while Erevlles et al. (2016) highlight that overemphasis on standardized procedures can constrain creative interpretation and limit strategic flexibility. Moreover, scholars debate the generalizability of marketing research findings, as models developed in one market context may not reliably predict outcomes in others, creating a contested boundary between scientific precision and practical applicability. Despite these debates, the integration of structured research design, empirical validation, and analytical rigor allows marketing research to operationalize marketing as a systematic, evidence-based discipline, demonstrating its scientific credentials while exposing the inherent tension between methodological rigor and the complex, context-dependent nature of consumer and market phenomena.

Data-driven Decision Making

Data-driven decision making (DDDM) is the systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and applying data to guide business decisions and optimize performance outcomes (Bose, 2021). In marketing, this involves leveraging consumer insights, market trends, and performance metrics to inform strategic actions, moving the discipline from intuition-based practices toward evidence-based approaches (Hossain et al., 2022; Keller & Lehmann, 2019). Scholars widely agree that DDDM enhances the scientific nature of marketing by enabling hypothesis formulation, statistical testing, and predictive modeling, thus producing empirically grounded insights into consumer behaviour and market dynamics.

(Akkucuk & Cekic, 2021; Li et al., 2020). However, tensions emerge regarding the balance between rigorous data analysis and contextual or creative interpretation: while Chaffey (2019) emphasizes that DDDM elevates marketing to a scientific discipline by providing measurable, actionable evidence, others caution that excessive reliance on quantitative data can overlook qualitative nuances, cultural influences, and emotional drivers of consumer behaviour, limiting the richness of marketing insights (Pappas et al., 2020). Moreover, debates persist around the validity and generalizability of findings derived from big data, as patterns observed in one dataset or market context may not hold universally, raising concerns about overconfidence in predictive models (Li et al., 2020). Despite these tensions, DDDM operationalizes marketing as a systematic, empirical practice, providing robust frameworks for strategic decision-making, while simultaneously revealing the ongoing challenge of integrating analytical rigor with the complex, human-centred realities of consumer engagement.

Testing and Experimentation

Testing and experimentation in marketing are defined as systematic procedures used to evaluate how variations in strategies, messages, or channels affect consumer behaviour, enabling marketers to draw evidence-based conclusions and optimize performance (Malhotra, 2020; Liu et al., 2021). This practice typically involves controlled experiments, such as A/B testing, where independent variables are manipulated and their impact on dependent outcomes is measured, allowing causal relationships to be inferred (Kahn et al., 2017). Scholars generally agree that these methods enhance marketing's scientific nature by introducing empirical rigor, hypothesis testing, and reproducibility into decision-making (Zhang et al., 2020; Fader & Hardie, 2019). However, tensions arise regarding the applicability and interpretation of results: while some researchers argue that controlled testing ensures objectivity and strengthens predictive power, others caution that consumer behaviour is context-dependent, and experiments may fail to capture cultural, social, or emotional complexities, which can limit generalizability (Liu et al., 2021). Further debate exists on the trade-off between experimental control and real-world relevance, as tightly controlled studies provide reliable data but may not fully reflect dynamic market conditions (Fader & Hardie, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Despite these tensions, testing and experimentation firmly position marketing as a science by grounding strategy in quantifiable evidence, fostering continuous learning, and enabling marketers to systematically refine interventions while revealing the limits and challenges of applying laboratory-like precision in human-centered, variable-rich market contexts.

Performance Measurement and Optimization

Performance measurement and optimization in marketing are systematic processes for evaluating and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing activities through empirical evidence and data analysis (Dubey et al., 2015; Chaffey, 2020). Performance measurement involves identifying key performance indicators (KPIs), collecting

quantitative and qualitative data, and comparing results against benchmarks to assess the success of marketing strategies, while optimization entails refining campaigns iteratively based on these insights to enhance outcomes and resource allocation (Aaker & Jacobson, 2021; Kumar et al., 2019). Scholars largely agree that this practice strengthens marketing's scientific foundation by introducing methodological rigor and evidence-based decision-making (Baker et al., 2016; Katsikeas et al., 2016), yet tensions emerge regarding interpretation and implementation. Some researchers emphasize that the reliance on quantitative metrics ensures objectivity and predictive accuracy, yet others caution that overdependence on metrics can obscure qualitative dimensions such as brand equity, consumer sentiment, and cultural context, which are harder to measure but vital for marketing effectiveness (Farris et al., 2018; Dahl & Sweeney, 2020). Furthermore, while tools like A/B testing, multivariate analysis, and predictive modeling provide structured, reproducible insights, scholars debate whether these techniques can fully capture dynamic consumer behaviour in volatile markets, highlighting the tension between controlled measurement and real-world applicability (Katsikeas et al., 2016; Chaffey, 2020). Despite these scholarly disagreements, performance measurement and optimization exemplify the scientific nature of marketing by grounding decisions in systematically gathered and analyzed data, facilitating iterative learning, and reinforcing accountability, while also revealing the inherent limitations of applying purely quantitative methods to the complex, context-sensitive domain of consumer engagement.

What is the Position of Scholars on this Debate?

Several arguments have been put forward by scholars on the true nature of marketing in contemporary times. The debate primarily revolves around whether marketing should be classified as an art, a science, or an interdisciplinary field that incorporates elements of both. This complex discourse reflects the multifaceted nature of marketing, highlighting various perspectives grounded in theoretical and practical insights.

One argument in favour of marketing as a science is rooted in its reliance on data analytics and empirical research to inform decisions. According to Kannan and Li (2017), marketing has increasingly embraced quantitative methods, utilizing big data and analytics to predict consumer behaviour, measure campaign effectiveness, and optimize marketing strategies. This approach aligns marketing with scientific principles, as it emphasizes hypothesis testing and the use of statistical methods to derive insights. The implication of this argument is that marketing professionals are becoming more like scientists, relying on rigorous methodologies to substantiate their strategies. However, critics argue that an overemphasis on data can lead to a neglect of creativity and emotional intelligence, which are crucial in crafting compelling marketing narratives.

Conversely, some scholars assert that marketing is fundamentally an art due to its focus on creativity, storytelling, and emotional engagement. For instance, Tynan and McKechnie (2016) argue that successful marketing campaigns often rely on the ability to create an emotional connection with consumers through compelling narratives and aesthetically

pleasing visuals. This artistic aspect of marketing involves intuition and subjective interpretation, which contrasts sharply with the objective nature of scientific inquiry. The implication here is that while data can inform marketing decisions, the effectiveness of those decisions often hinges on the creativity and artistry of the marketer. This perspective suggests that the true essence of marketing lies in its ability to resonate emotionally with consumers rather than purely in analytical prowess.

Further complicating the debate, scholars like Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) suggest that marketing functions as a hybrid discipline, integrating both scientific and artistic components. They emphasize that while data-driven decision-making is essential, the application of that data must be informed by a deep understanding of human psychology and cultural nuances. This perspective highlights that effective marketing strategies must balance empirical evidence with creative insights, advocating for an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses both scientific rigor and artistic creativity. The implication of this argument is that marketers must cultivate skills in both areas to create holistic strategies that resonate with diverse audiences.

Another perspective comes from scholars who focus on the psychological aspects of consumer behaviour, asserting that marketing is a social science. For instance, Solomon (2018) posits that understanding consumer motivations and behaviours requires a foundation in psychology and sociology, suggesting that marketing practitioners must be adept at analyzing social contexts and cultural influences. The implication here is that while scientific methods can quantify consumer preferences, the interpretation of those preferences necessitates a nuanced understanding of social dynamics, which leans toward the artistic domain. This view underscores the importance of empathy and human-centric thinking in crafting effective marketing strategies.

Additionally, the concept of experiential marketing further emphasizes the artistic elements within the discipline. Pine and Gilmore (2019) highlight that modern consumers seek memorable experiences rather than merely transactional interactions. This perspective posits that marketing is an art form that designs experiences that engage consumers on a sensory level, thereby fostering brand loyalty and emotional attachment. The implication is that marketers must leverage creativity to curate experiences that stand out in an increasingly crowded marketplace, showcasing the necessity of artistic expression in marketing strategies.

Moreover, some scholars argue that the marketing discipline's evolution into digital realms reinforces its scientific nature. As noted by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2016), the rise of digital marketing has led to a greater emphasis on metrics, algorithms, and user data analysis, further cementing marketing's identity as a science. This evolution reflects a shift toward more systematic approaches to understanding consumer behaviour, driven by technological advancements. The implication is that marketers must develop technical competencies alongside creative skills to navigate this data-driven landscape effectively. Conversely, the role of branding in marketing emphasizes its artistic side. Aaker (2017) asserts that branding is a nuanced art form that involves creating a distinctive identity and

emotional resonance with consumers. This argument suggests that successful brands often stem from innovative and creative strategies that transcend mere transactional value, focusing instead on building long-term relationships with consumers. The implication here is that while brands may utilize data for insights, the heart of branding lies in its artistic elements, highlighting the need for creativity in building strong brand narratives.

Additionally, some scholars focus on the ethical dimensions of marketing, framing it as a discipline that transcends traditional classifications. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), ethical marketing practices necessitate a blend of scientific analysis and artistic sensitivity, requiring marketers to consider the broader implications of their strategies on society and the environment. The implication of this argument is that marketing professionals must be equipped with a comprehensive skill set that includes both ethical reasoning and creative problem-solving, reinforcing the idea of marketing as a multifaceted discipline.

Furthermore, the integration of technology into marketing practices has prompted scholars like Lemon and Verhoef (2016) to argue that marketing is becoming increasingly scientific due to advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning. These technologies enable marketers to analyze vast amounts of data and automate decision-making processes, reinforcing the notion that marketing is rooted in scientific methodologies. The implication is that as technology evolves, so too must the skill set of marketing professionals, who must navigate both the technical and creative aspects of their work.

In summary, the discourse among scholars regarding whether marketing is an art or science reveals a complex interplay between creativity and empirical rigor. Many scholars acknowledge that marketing encompasses both domains, necessitating an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates scientific methods alongside artistic expression. The general consensus suggests that marketing cannot be purely classified as solely an art or a science; rather, it exists at the intersection of both, drawing from each discipline to create effective strategies that resonate with consumers while being grounded in data and analysis. Therefore, marketing can be best understood as a dynamic and evolving discipline that leverages the strengths of both art and science to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of consumer behaviour and technological advancements.

Conclusion and Practical Implications

This study set out to explore scholarly debates on the disciplinary nature of marketing, with a focus on whether it should be understood as an art, a science, or an interdisciplinary field combining elements of both. The analysis shows that marketing cannot be neatly classified into a single category; rather, it functions as a hybrid discipline where creativity, emotional engagement, and storytelling coexist with data-driven strategies, empirical research, and performance measurement. In addressing the implicit research objectives, the review finds that each objective is substantively achieved: marketing as an art emphasizes imagination, narrative construction, visual design, and emotional resonance, while marketing as a

science relies on systematic methodologies, consumer behaviour analysis, testing, optimization, and data-driven decision-making.

Beyond confirming the interdisciplinary consensus, this review contributes to the literature by synthesizing evidence across multiple domains, clarifying the tensions between artistic expression and scientific rigor, and providing a structured framework to understand how these dimensions interact in practice. It highlights that marketing strategies often originate from creative insights but require empirical validation and optimization to be effective, demonstrating a dynamic interplay where art informs strategy and science ensures measurability and predictability. Practically, this integrated perspective guides marketers to design campaigns that are simultaneously imaginative and analytically grounded, balancing emotional engagement with evidence-based decision-making. By doing so, practitioners can better anticipate consumer behaviour, tailor experiences, and achieve measurable business outcomes, reinforcing the value of viewing marketing as a discipline that bridges artistry and scientific inquiry.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, we make the following recommendations to enable educational institutions, industry professionals and researchers align their programmes with the dynamic multidisciplinary nature of marketing in contemporary times:

- i. Educational institutions should design programmes that balance quantitative and creative modules, combining data analytics with courses on storytelling, visual design, and experiential marketing. This recommendation is supported by the literature showing that marketing success requires both empirical rigor and imaginative execution, enabling students to understand consumer behaviour while developing campaigns that resonate emotionally and aesthetically.
- ii. Marketing curricula should incorporate social sciences, psychology, and behavioural studies alongside data-driven modules. As highlighted in the review, understanding consumer motivations and emotional drivers necessitates knowledge of both empirical research methods and human-centric approaches. Cross-disciplinary learning equips future marketers to interpret complex behavioural patterns while fostering creative insight.
- iii. Industry professionals should develop cross-functional teams that include data analysts, creative strategists, and behavioural specialists. Evidence from the review indicates that effective marketing interventions blend scientific and artistic inputs, for instance by combining predictive modelling with narrative-driven campaign design. Collaborative structures ensure both accuracy and emotional resonance in marketing outcomes.
- iv. Educational programmes should regularly incorporate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and advanced analytics, while also emphasizing creative interpretation and narrative skills. The review shows that modern marketing increasingly relies on AI-driven consumer insights but that these

tools are most effective when paired with imaginative application and human-centric design.

- v. Researchers should pursue further qualitative and conceptual studies exploring how marketing integrates artistic and scientific elements, particularly in the context of digital transformation, AI, and evolving consumer expectations. The review underscores persistent debates and tensions between creativity and empirical rigor, suggesting the need for continued academic investigation to refine theoretical frameworks and guide practice.

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