



# The paradoxical marketer: Interpretations, illustrations, and implications



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## KEYWORDS

Paradox;  
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**Abstract** Marketers face many daily dilemmas and conflicting consumer pressures. As such, there is a need for marketers to become more paradoxical in how they consider their roles. In other words, they must be able to combine two seemingly opposite forces in their marketing efforts. In this article, I suggest that marketers are being drawn into four distinct paradoxical roles: (1) authentic illusionist, (2) conforming rebel, (3) empathetic technologist, and (4) artistic scientist. A failure to acknowledge these roles may be disadvantageous to businesses in a marketplace. However, by learning and enacting these paradoxical roles, marketers can create a competitive advantage for their organizations. While the concept of paradoxes has previously been described in the field of marketing, the present study is unique in that it provides four specific paradoxical roles for marketers and introduces the DUAL roadmap to help effectively manage them.

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## 1. Markets are increasingly paradoxical

Marketplaces abound with conflicting demands: Consumers want ever-better products at ever-lower prices, investors demand impressive triple-bottom-line returns, and competitors want to vie for market share yet must collaborate on general market conditions. How can marketers deal with such paradoxes that surround them from all sides of the market?

A great deal of marketing activity is inherently paradoxical in nature, as marketers face daily dilemmas (e.g., [Slotegraaf & Dickson, 2004](#)) and conflicting consumer pressures (e.g., [Brown, 2006](#)). A *paradox* refers to a situation in which “polar opposite conditions can simultaneously exist, or at least can be potentiated, in the same thing” ([Mick & Fournier, 1998](#), p. 124), and such situations are ubiquitous in marketplaces. It can have dire consequences for firms if they leave marketplace paradoxes unattended. For instance, firm performance—or even the survival of the business—may be threatened by unattended

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paradoxes, and effectively addressing paradoxes may result in a competitive advantage. Consider the hardship that Nokia suffered from being too technology- and device-oriented and not sufficiently user-oriented. Instead of seeing its devices as a platform for an ecosystem, they relied on what they deemed to be superior technology. In contrast, Apple succeeded in building a digital ecosystem and popular design products that allowed users to access that very ecosystem by effectively addressing the technology vs. user-orientation paradox. That is, it understood what was technically possible and how consumer culture was (and could be) shifting toward ecosystems. What seemed like a trade-off to one company (Nokia) was a manageable paradox to another company (Apple)—and as readers of this journal will know, widely different competitive paths emerged as a result.

The predominant reason for marketplace paradoxes resides with changing consumers. Consumers are different and have different wants and needs—which is why companies develop different segments. Increasingly, marketers feel the conflicting consumer demands from these different consumer groups. While classic marketing advice would suggest that marketers should prioritize and target just a few of these segments, it is increasingly difficult to keep different customer groups apart; consumers converse, interact, share information, act differently in different settings, and are generally well-informed of changes in the marketplace. If they see that you can deliver a desired feature to another group of customers, they will demand that feature as well. Consumers now more than ever expect their demands to be met. They care deeply about their relationships with brands—and they are linked to one another. In short, consumers have become more entitled, engaged, and entangled (Pedersen & Ritter, 2020).

While customers are an important and primary source of conflicting demands, marketers also face opposing requests from other stakeholder groups. For instance, politicians expect companies to be good corporate citizens living up to established environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria, whereas some investors may primarily have financial interests in the company, resulting in conflicting scenarios. Another recent source of paradoxical pressures may originate from the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals which can also cause conflicting priorities for companies. As such, there is a socially driven expectation and demand for marketers to have paradoxical roles to help navigate marketplaces with conflicting interests.

Marketing managers have existing socially established roles, but the emergence of marketplace paradoxes has established the need for broadening the role of marketers. Drawing on paradox theory and social role theory, I contend that due to paradoxical marketplace pressures, marketers are forced to enact different paradoxical roles. That is, marketers need to enact different paradoxical roles to deal with opposing pressures of their multistakeholder reality.

This article proceeds as follows. I first provide a brief review of social role theory and paradox theory. I then introduce, explain, and illustrate the four paradoxical roles. Finally, I derive managerial lessons in the form of the DUAL roadmap, before providing concluding remarks and implications.

## 2. How marketers' roles are changing

### 2.1. Social role theory

We all have different roles that we perform on a daily basis. Roles often have preestablished expectations, so we may perform a role in accordance with these expectations established by others. At its core, *social role theory* suggests that individuals in groups gravitate to commonly known social roles in that group, which, in turn, shape their decision-making and actions (Gregersen & Lehman, 2021). *Role theory* considers individuals to be similar to actors on a stage, whereby an individual's behavior is predicated upon expectations and social cues associated with socially defined positions (Solomon et al., 1985).

Role expectations are predominantly determined by the duties and obligations of an occupant of a social position (Sarbin & Allen, 1968), and they are defined in relation to complementary positions—the totality of which is referred to as a *role set* (Merton, 1957). Role theory suggests that social roles carry important implications for an individual's sense of self and that this sense of self is negotiated and influenced by how one interprets others' perceptions and expectations of one's social role (Mead & Morris, 1934).

While social role theory was not developed with marketers in mind, the conceptual work arguably carries important implications for the marketing domain. Being a marketer is a role that has certain expectations related to it. For instance, the common expectations of the duties and obligations of a marketer require them to (1) collect market information, (2) share important customer insights internally, (3) plan advertising and other promotional campaigns, and (4) track how effective the

promotional expenditure has been. As such, the typical marketer role is seen as an organizational support function (e.g., for sales and/or an enabler for business growth). However, when markets become paradoxical, so must the marketer's role. Here, it is not enough to follow the conventional script of what a marketer is, as that script and marketing practice may become obsolete and become a disadvantage in the marketplace. In contrast, the duties and obligations of a paradoxical marketer should be: (1) identifying, understanding, and assessing core paradoxes in the marketplace, (2) disseminating this internally in the organization, (3) supporting the effective responses to marketplace paradoxes, and (4) tracking how effective company responses are in addressing paradoxes.

## 2.2. Paradoxical roles

As contradictory market demands intensify, there is a need to understand paradoxes (Smith & Lewis, 2011). A *paradox* reflects the idea that “polar opposite conditions can simultaneously exist, or at least can be potentiated, in the same thing” (Mick & Fournier, 1998, p. 124). A paradox is a phenomenon in which two seemingly contradictory forces appear to be true at the same time (Poole & Van De Ven, 1989). Consequently, a paradox can be defined as “a situation where two apparently contradictory tensions appear to be simultaneously credible and where resolution is pursued in a nonexclusionary way” (O’Driscoll, 2008, pp. 96–97). Against this backdrop, it can be argued that a great deal of marketing activity is inherently paradoxical in nature, as marketers face daily dilemmas (e.g., Slotegraaf & Dickson, 2004) and conflicting consumer pressures (e.g., Brown, 2006).

Marketing has long been interested in the notion of paradoxes (e.g., Brown, 2006; Hill et al., 2007; Mick & Fournier, 1998; O’Driscoll, 2008; Slotegraaf & Dickson, 2004). For instance, the novelist Alex Shakar (2001) posits that every successful product promises to satisfy two opposing desires simultaneously—and that the job of any marketer is to cultivate this schismatic core. Shakar frames this paradoxical essence as *paradessence* and suggests that it lies at the heart of consumer motivation. Hence, paradoxes are central to many marketing activities and their subsequent success. Brown (2006, p. 52) draws upon the *paradessence* notion to state that products “blessed with *paradessence* somehow combine two mutually exclusive states and satisfy both simultaneously. Ice cream melds eroticism and innocence. Air travel offers sanitized

adventure. Amusement parks provide terror and reassurance.” In a similar vein, Mick and Fournier (1998) identify eight paradoxes of technological products:

1. Control/chaos
2. Freedom/enslavement
3. New/obsolete
4. Competence/incompetence
5. Efficiency/inefficiency
6. Needs fulfillment/needs creation
7. Assimilation/isolation
8. Engagement/disengagement

In combination, these studies illustrate the prevalence of paradoxical marketplace phenomena and marketer requirements.

Although marketing has long been preoccupied with paradoxes, little specific guidance is available for managers and marketers. Moreover, it is unclear how marketplace paradoxes may influence or change the marketer's role and its expected duties and obligations. It is here that the present article seeks to contribute: It is suggested that some of the central marketplace forces can be captured and described in four overall paradoxical marketer roles—and that it is possible to address the paradoxes following a structured process. In Section 2.2.1., I first introduce and explain the four key paradoxical marketer roles and then provide a structured approach to managing them.

### 2.2.1. Four key paradoxical marketer roles

If the marketplace is inherently paradoxical, and if the prime objective of marketers is to understand and satisfy consumer needs, then these tensions must result in a need for marketers to play paradoxical roles. The different tensions typically originate from macrolevel forces (e.g., new technological and political developments, as well as changes in consumer culture) that together place different forms of paradoxical requirements on marketers. When viewed through the lens of social role theory, such tensions create four novel paradoxical roles for marketers:

1. *Authentic Illusionist*: The macrolevel trends creating this dual requirement are consumer

demands for authentic experiences, memorable surprises, and choreographed experiences.

2. *Conforming rebel*: The macrolevel trends that shape this dual role are corporate activism (in response to consumer demands, media requirements, and industry isomorphism) and the existence of wicked problems (at both a local and global level), which necessitate plural sector responses and solutions.
3. *Empathetic Technologist*: The dual role originates from technological progress in AI and automation, which has subsequently given rise to a countermovement emphasizing the importance of empathy.
4. *Artistic Scientist*: The macrolevel trends that shape this dual role include pioneering breakthroughs that give license to operate in many industries and the hypercompetitive dynamics and low-cost competition of today's globalized world, which make creativity a key differentiator.

The conflicting reality of marketplaces and the seemingly opposing consumer demands and expectations create a need for paradoxical roles for marketers. In other words, paradoxical roles are a specific response to conflicting stakeholder demands which, in turn, are created by external, conflicting forces.

### 3. The paradoxical marketer roles

The paradoxical roles that shape marketing are explained in [Tables 1 and 2](#). [Table 1](#) provides an overview of the roles, and [Table 2](#) provides an overview of the interpretations and implications of each. Below, I further detail the mechanisms that characterize each role, including how the roles materialize themselves in practice.

#### 3.1. Authentic illusionist

The fact that consumers demand experiences is well established ([Pine & Gilmore, 1999](#)). Yet, the type of experiences they seek are materializing in two intertwined directions. On the one hand, consumers want to be surprised and awed by magical illusions. On the other hand, they increasingly desire authentic experiences. Consequently, modern marketers need to be *authentic illusionists*, meaning they must stage surprising consumer illusions that create experiences that

exceed expectations and seem inherently authentic.

The consumer expectation of surprising illusions is not new, but it has arguably become more pronounced in recent years as a means of differentiating among a multitude of experiences ([Brown, 2001, 2006](#); [Miles, 2013](#); [Thomke, 2019](#); [Thomke & Randal, 2014](#)). The literature on magic in marketing is generally subdivided into two distinct streams—one focusing on the magical nature of marketing ([Brown, 2002](#)), and one focusing on the specifics of using illusionist methods to craft marketplace surprises and memorable consumer experiences ([Thomke, 2019](#)). As Brown notes, alchemy is often a key tenet of modern marketing. Inspired by the marketing success of the Harry Potter universe, Brown suggests that marketing should be comprised of magic, mystery, and imagination ([Brown, 2002](#), p. 11):

The manifold magic kingdoms of hyperreal estate hold countless adults (Las Vegas) and children (Disneyland) spellbound by their amazing disappearing dollar tricks. Price cuts are never less than 'fantastic,' 'incredible,' or 'extraordinary.' They have to be seen to be believed.

This hyperreality blurs the distinction between what is real and what is not ([Firat & Venkatesh, 1995](#)). When looking at the literature stream that focuses on the operational specifics of magical marketing, it becomes apparent that a magic trick in the marketplace has three fundamental components: how to do it, how to hide it (i.e., how to decide what to show), and how to sell it ([Thomke & Randal, 2014](#)). The second component—deciding what to hide and what to show—is particularly essential for crafting an illusion that can impress audiences, regardless of whether that illusion is presented by a magician or a marketer. Perfecting an illusion can evoke a strong affective response among consumers ([Thomke, 2019](#)).

However, in a marketplace filled with staged experiences, consumers gravitate toward what they perceive as authentic ([Gilmore & Pine, 2007](#); [Nunes et al., 2021](#)). As posited by [Gilmore and Pine \(2007\)](#), in a world with staged (i.e., unreal) experiences, what will be consumed depends on what is being perceived as authentic. In other words, consumers want the “real” product, service, brand, and/or experience, although what is real may, ironically, be a matter of consumer perception. As such, perceptions may differ from reality, and authenticity may be a crafted illusion.

The authentic illusionist masters such paradoxes. Here, marketing centers on creating

**Table 1. Selected studies of relevance for the paradoxical roles**

<i>Paradoxical roles</i>	<i>Causal macro trends</i>	<i>Related literature</i>
<b>Authentic illusionist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural moves to authenticity</li> <li>• Cultural moves to experiences</li> </ul>	Brown (2001, 2002, 2006); Miles (2013); Nunes et al. (2021); Gilmore and Pine (2007); Thomke (2019); Thomke and Randal (2014)
<b>Conforming rebel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate activism movements</li> <li>• Wicked problems at a macro level</li> </ul>	Chatterji and Toffel (2019); Kotler and Zaltman (1971); Mirzaei et al. (2022); Porter and Kramer (2011); Pöyry and Laaksonen (2022); Sheth (1967, 2020); Warren (2003)
<b>Empathetic technologist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automation and IT progress</li> <li>• Cultural counter-movement</li> </ul>	Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014); Kumar (2018); Pedersen (2021, 2022); Rust (2020); Schmitt (2019)
<b>Artistic scientist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global commodity trap</li> <li>• The rise of the creative economy</li> </ul>	Bartels (1951); Brown (2001); Levitt (1993); Oxman (2016)

**Table 2. Interpretations and implications of social roles**

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Implication</b>
Authentic illusionist	The <i>authentic illusionist</i> creates memorable surprises—which entail tricks and illusions—while removing any suspicion of creating a staged experience. Authenticity is conveyed but not explicitly mentioned.	Consistency and inconsistency need to be balanced. Consistency conveys authenticity, while inconsistency conveys surprise. Being <i>consistently inconsistent</i> may be an option.
Conforming rebel	Marketers increasingly need to both conform to the expectations of their local environment and be able to challenge the local environment if necessary. Being a good citizen in a local environment sometimes requires firms to be politicians in that they need to influence the community to maintain its general well-being.	The <i>conforming rebel</i> needs to continuously transition between being influenced by the political system and influencing the political system. Such a balance can be termed <i>influenced influencing</i> .
Empathetic technologist	Marketers need to be naturally inclined technologists and simultaneously maintain a core capacity for consumer-directed empathy. In other words, marketers need to be <i>empathetic technologists</i> .	Marketers must engage in <i>connected connecting</i> . In other words, they need to be a part of a networked reality fueled by technology (connected) and utilize that basis to form relationships with consumers (connecting).
Artistic scientist	Marketers need to be <i>artistic scientists</i> who integrate intuitive creativity with rational analysis. Scientific reasoning provides the stringent means needed to test and validate hypotheses, which are necessary for generating valid knowledge. At the same time, art questions assumptions, generates creative ideas that may feed into hypothesis generation, and emphasizes the importance of expression and aesthetics.	Marketers need to engage in <i>questioned questioning</i> . In other words, they need to dedicate themselves to obtaining answers from the market in a systematic and scientific way (questioning), but the underlying assumptions of this endeavor must always be postulated (questioned).

memorable surprises—which entail tricks and illusions, while removing any suspicion of a staged experience. Authenticity is conveyed without

being explicitly mentioned. Of course, these dual requirements often necessitate dual solutions, as consistency and inconsistency need to be



balanced. Consistency conveys authenticity, while inconsistency conveys surprise. Therefore, being consistently inconsistent may be the optimal solution for the authentic illusionist.

An example of the authentic illusionist can be found in Tivoli, the Danish amusement park located in central Copenhagen. Tivoli's slogan is "Always like never before," which expresses the tension between consistency (authenticity) and inconsistency (surprise). Tivoli opened in 1843, and it has drawn on its rich history and heritage over the years, with many artifacts dedicated to maintaining its historical feel. Yet, the amusement park is also developing and changing with every season via the introduction of, for instance, unique amusements and hotels as well as completely new virtual and digital services.

### 3.2. Conforming rebel

Modern marketers are increasingly expected not only to conform to the expectations of their local environments but also to have the capability and willingness to challenge that very setting if the situational circumstances require it. As such, marketers need to have a dual focus on citizenship and conforming to political regulation while also being politically engaged, often acting as an activist that challenges political stands. Marketers are now more attuned to their responsibilities to the communities and political and regulatory environments in which they reside (Sheth, 2020). However, marketers are also finding it increasingly important to take a stand on certain high-profile political issues (Chatterji & Toffel, 2019) and attempt to influence change (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). Hence, consumers have greater expectations that companies convey citizenship, be accountable for their local communities, and shape the trajectory of the local community via political activism on matters unrelated to their core activities. The tension between conformity and deviance is, therefore, critical for businesses (e.g., Warren, 2003), and I consider such a paradoxical role to be the *conforming rebel*.

The literature on citizenship in marketing has grown in recent years. Certain crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have emphasized how important organizations are to their local communities, and the responsibilities of organizations to invest in and be cognizant of their surrounding environments. Sheth (2020) argues that long-term, multigenerational relationships between an organization and its local community have been overlooked in research, which is unfortunate, as relationships are essential for business and reduce

transaction costs. Similar reasoning is found in the concept of creating shared value. According to Porter and Kramer (2011), *shared value* focuses on the symbiotic interconnections between the social and economic domains, which are needed to drive both societal and economic growth. Specifically, firms need to make decisions and pursue opportunities that reinforce profit and society at the same time. This approach is different than philanthropy, as it rests on the assumption that business performance is predicated on the well-being of one's local environment. In other words, businesses need to convey citizenship to thrive.

At the same time, companies need to take an active stance on societal issues that are, strictly speaking, outside the domain of their core businesses—and this requirement is becoming more pronounced. Consider, for instance, the case of BOA's Moynihan and PayPal's Dan Schulman, who took a stand against a North Carolina law that required people to use the bathrooms that corresponded to the gender listed on their birth certificates. Their stance spurred a debate on transgender rights. According to Chatterji and Toffel (2018), this new form of corporate activism can include raising awareness of an issue or exerting economic pressure to influence an issue. The former is the most relevant avenue from a marketing perspective.

A related line of work is that of brand activism. Brand activism describes brands taking a stand on highly polarizing sociopolitical issues—which can hurt the brand substantially but may also be beneficial in cases with strong public backlash (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Depending on the political environment, polarizing issues may result in boycotts that, in turn, actually can enhance sales from supporters (Neureiter & Bhattacharya, 2021).

While being a good citizen and trying to influence local communities may initially seem oppositional, they actually often complement one another. Being a good citizen in a local environment sometimes requires firms to act as politicians or activists in the sense that they need to influence the community to maintain its general well-being. While the best way to do this is debatable, it is still important for marketers to engage in such local debates. As such, marketers need to enact both conforming and deviant behavior in terms of the sociopolitical environment.

As such, the conforming rebel needs to continuously transition between being influenced by the political system and influencing the political system. Such a balance can be termed *influenced influencing*. An example of a conforming rebel is Nike, which has made a variety of political

statements over the years that capture the zeitgeist of the local community. For instance, in 2020, Nike released a video entitled “For once, don’t do it,” which implored viewers not to “pretend there is not a problem in America.” It released the video following the protests amid the death of George Floyd, a Black man who died after a white officer pressed a knee into his neck. As Nike both captured a zeitgeist and presumably sought to influence change, it arguably engaged in influenced influencing.

### 3.3. Empathetic technologist

With the advent of digitization, big data, artificial intelligence (AI; Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014), and myriad other technologies (e.g., 3D printing, robotics, and pervasive computing; Segars, 2018), it is paramount that marketers follow, understand, and adopt novel technological opportunities (Kumar, 2018; Schmitt, 2019). In other words, marketers need to be naturally inclined technologists. As consumers become technology literate, so must marketers. However, there is also a countermovement focused on recognizing empathy as a core foundation for marketing and an essential component of the business-consumer exchange. As Pedersen (2021, 2022) notes, the overlap between technology and empathy is important because chatbots, for instance, are often found in consumer interactions, and the issue of empathy is becoming important in such contexts. It follows that all organizations are to some extent technology companies, but not all organizations are necessarily empathetically inclined. As a consequence, becoming an empathetic technologist can create a source of competitive advantage in many markets.

Technological developments are changing the face of marketing. According to Rust (2020, p. 15), technological developments such as AI are making the Four Ps of marketing largely obsolete. Moreover, Schmitt (2019, p. 825) posits that:

The digital revolution is entering a new phase, from bits back to atoms, by incorporating digital information into physical, solid products. Technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), augmented reality and virtual reality (AR/VR), artificial intelligence (AI), robots, smart cars, blockchain, 3D printing, and the like are on the verge of mass commercialization and likely to turn consumers’ lives upside down once more.

Consequently, if marketers wish to maintain their relevance, they must continuously follow these technological developments and become adept at

using and enhancing them in the marketing domain. To do so, marketers will need to be part-time engineers in terms of their technological understanding. At the same time, they must maintain their empathy (i.e., capacity for empathetic reasoning) toward consumers despite this technological transformation.

Empathy has been a cornerstone of the marketing discipline since its inception, but recent technological advances make empathy even more important, leading to the emergence of *empathy-based marketing*. According to Pedersen (2021, 2022), the most successful organizations take on an empathetic approach to understanding customers and develop responses that address customers’ needs and wants. Schmitt (2019) similarly acknowledges a tendency toward humanizing technology, and Rust (2020, p. 18) posits that marketers “are discovering that they spend an increasing amount of their time on interpersonal, empathetic, ‘feeling’ tasks, while AI assumes more of the ‘thinking’ tasks.” As such, technological advances fuel two different yet complementary trajectories for marketers: they must be technologically literate and maintain an empathetic, human touch. The implication is that marketers must take on the role of *empathetic technologists* who engage in *connected connecting*.<sup>1</sup> This means that they must be part of a networked reality fueled by technology (connected) and utilize that basis to form relationships with consumers (connecting). Acceptance of this paradoxical role with dual tasks may result in superior market performance. Hence, the future of marketing belongs to those who can juggle and balance both technological and human considerations in their marketing efforts, which requires the mastery of connected connecting.

An example of an empathetic technologist is Intel. The renowned tech company has combined quantitative data and technological literacy with qualitative ethnographic research since the mid-nineties. Their resulting insights helped Intel move into consumer markets and have led to significant resegmentation of certain markets.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Intel has an anthropologist acting as a resident tech intellectual used to forecast the future of

<sup>1</sup> See also <https://cmr.berkeley.edu/2022/07/why-the-future-belongs-to-empathetic-technologists/>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://toppandigital.com/translation-blog/how-big-brands-use-ethnography-for-in-depth-customer-insight/> and <https://www.epicpeople.org/creators-market-ethnography-gave-intel-new-perspective-digital-content-creators/> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/technology/intels-sharp-eyed-social-scientist.html>

computing—and overseeing a team of over 100 social scientists and designers.<sup>3</sup> This bolsters Intel’s reputation as an empathetic technologist, combining the best of both worlds in an integrated understanding of and response to evolving market developments.

### 3.4. Artistic scientist

Marketers need to be *artistic scientists* who integrate intuitive creativity with rational analysis. Marketing has long been caught between proponents who argue that marketing is an art and those who see it as a science (Brown, 2001; Pedersen, 2021). While marketing undeniably has an artistic core (Brown, 2001; Levitt, 1993), science has arguably become the predominant means of thinking in modern marketing (Pedersen, 2021). However, art and science need not be mutually exclusive, as they often complement each other (Oxman, 2016). More specifically, scientific reasoning provides the stringent means necessary for formulating, testing, and validating hypotheses—steps necessary for generating valid market knowledge (Pedersen & Ritter, 2022). At the same time, art questions assumptions, generates creative ideas to develop hypotheses, and emphasizes the importance of expression and aesthetics.

The debate over the extent to which marketing is, or can be, a science has been ongoing for decades (Bartels, 1951). While in recent decades, marketers have generally focused on the importance of strong theoretical foundations, scientific reasoning has become much more empirical, driven by technological advances that promote rapid experimentation (Thomke, 2019). As such, the scientific role of the marketer has become more pronounced due to the surge in big data and analytical technologies, which provide low-cost means for engaging in numerous experiments on a daily basis. At the same time, it is important to note that this empirical testing must rest on strong theoretical foundations to be considered scientific. Overall, the scientific process for marketers entails both a priori hypothesis generation and a posteriori testing.

Creative vision is also required in the scientific process. This activity is predominantly predicated on artistic capacities, as it entails novel vision (Mintzberg & Westley, 2001). For a business to differentiate itself in a marketplace, it needs contrarian thinkers who go against the grain and

generate creative visions (Felin & Zenger, 2017). As Brown (2001, pp. 257–258) notes, successful marketing practitioners are also creative artists that do not follow rules, guidelines, or the conventional wisdom as prescribed in marketing textbooks. They do not just break the rules, they rewrite them altogether. As such, great marketing is artistic and the result of creative, non-conforming individuals who deviate from the status quo.

This discussion indicates that marketers need both scientific and artistic aspects in their market presence. Brown (2001, p. 258) suggested the distinction between arts and science is not clear-cut, as “numerous physical scientists have attested to the essentially aesthetic qualities of scientific discovery and research—Bohr’s injunction that we must try to think like poets being just one among many.” As such, marketers need an artistic side to challenge assumptions, formulate visions (i.e., hypotheses to be tested), and understand market aesthetics. At the same time, they must draw upon a body of knowledge (theory) that can be tested (empirics) via systematic procedures (methods). A direct implication is that artistic scientists need to engage in *questioned questioning*. In other words, they need to dedicate themselves to obtaining answers from the market in a systematic and scientific way (questioning), but the underlying assumptions of this endeavor must always be open to interpretation (questioned), much like the artist.

One example of the artistic scientist in marketing is the technology company Apple. Its products have continually been at the technological forefront due to scientific breakthroughs, though it has always recognized the importance of artful domains (e.g., branding, design, aesthetics, and experiences). Apple has also used creative vision to guide and question analytical explorations (i.e., questioned questioning). Moreover, it could be argued that the Apple brand was created by an artistic scientist duo of Steve Wozniak (scientist) and Steve Jobs (artist).

## 4. Managerial recommendations: The DUAL roadmap

As seen from the four paradoxical marketer roles reviewed above, it is not easy to navigate in marketplaces today, as seemingly conflicting pressures from different stakeholder groups make it nearly impossible to satisfy everyone. How, then, can marketers manage the many paradoxes they face? While each paradoxical role entails its own

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/technology/intels-sharp-eyed-social-scientist.html>



Table 3. The DUAL roadmap for the paradoxical marketer

	D	U	A	L
	Define the paradox	Uncover issues	Assess implications	Listen to market feedback
What does it mean?	Gain an understanding of the primary paradox you are facing and how it relates to the marketer roles.	Uncover the essence of the paradox: Why does it occur, and what is required to resolve it?	Asses what the paradox will mean for how marketing is practiced in your business.	Listen to market feedback and learn from what happens when you seek to address the paradox.
How to apply it?	Make it a habit to look for signs of the paradoxes in market reports, customer data, and industry intelligence.	Once a paradox has been identified, you need to collect information and insights on the drivers of the paradox.	When the paradox is identified and understood, you need to assess the potential business impacts of it.	Once you address the paradox, you will need to listen to market feedback to figure out how well it works in resolving the paradox.
Supportive questions	(1) Which of the roles best explains the paradox you are facing?  (2) Does it vary by product line and customer market?  (3) Is one of the paradoxes more important for your business than others?	(1) What causes the paradox to emerge and evolve?  (2) What is your role in shaping those causes?  (3) What would it take for your business to address the paradox?	(1) How will the paradox impact your business and marketing practice?  (2) To what extent can you succeed in addressing the paradox?  (3) Does the survival of your company depend on addressing the paradox? Can it provide a competitive advantage?	(1) What works—and does not work—in addressing the paradox?  (2) Have you experienced similar problems earlier or in different market contexts?  (3) Which early signs do you have of success or failure in addressing the paradoxes?

implications (i.e., being consistently inconsistent or engaging in connected connecting, etc.), it is also possible to generate a general roadmap for how to best address paradoxes—irrespective of which marketer role best characterizes your situation (see Table 3).

In line with the focus on paradoxes, the roadmap is structured around the acronym of DUAL, as paradoxes require a dual response to seemingly competing pressures. Specifically, the roadmap entails the processes of *defining* the paradox, *uncovering* the related issues, *assessing* the

implications for the business, and *listening* to market feedback when the paradox is addressed. In combination, the acronym and the related phases comprise a roadmap for structuring the messy and confusing work that paradoxes induce.

The DUAL Roadmap provides a process for effectively managing market paradoxes and helping marketers know when to enact a certain paradoxical role. While each phase in the model may be new to marketers, they should incorporate them into existing organizational work for seamless implementation. For instance, marketers

collect market intelligence on an ongoing basis (e.g., weekly or monthly), making it relatively straightforward to scan this preexisting information for early signs of a paradox and the underlying causes (Define and Understand). Little more than dedication and a watchful eye are required, as market intelligence is most often already being collected and analyzed. Marketers can also use preexisting meetings (e.g., quarterly reviews, market audit meetings, or sales briefings) to discuss these findings more broadly in terms of potential implications for the business (Assess). Once the paradox is acknowledged, assessed, and addressed, you must understand the success or failure of the market response. Here, you can similarly tap into preexisting market intelligence collections to obtain early market feedback (Listen). As such, the DUAL process ends where it starts, and it can be incorporated into the existing business processes of a marketing department.

Paradoxes need dual responses, but dual responses require (1) a comprehensive understanding of the paradox you are facing, and (2) a structured and streamlined process that can clarify and guide an already confusing situation. The DUAL roadmap does just that—one paradox at a time. As such, the DUAL roadmap also has a dual purpose: to guide both analysis and action. Great market responses walk on these two feet, as both analysis and action are necessary for moving a business forward in an evolving market. Yet, the two feet of analysis and action must also convey the same rhythmic pace and cadence to avoid stumbles in unfolding market dynamics. In that case, the roadmap not only points to where a marketer should go but also how marketers should proceed.

To illustrate the use of the DUAL roadmap, consider how it can be used to explain the recent market challenges faced by Twitter as Elon Musk acquired the company.<sup>4</sup> In October 2022, Musk took over Twitter in a public and controversial acquisition. Since then, outages have been on the rise, revenues have plunged, and the workforce went from around 7,500 to 2,000 employees in just a few months.<sup>5</sup> Many of the problems at Twitter have been attributed to an unfortunate leadership approach by Musk in relation to the takeover, yet some of the troubles—arguably—could have been

preempted by understanding the paradoxical role that the brand occupies.

In defining the paradox, Twitter faces the same challenge seen in the empathetic technologist role: the need to be technologically proficient with attention to human empathy. After all, Twitter is a social media platform that is both online (technology) and able to motivate people to socially interact (empathy). The very business model of Twitter relies on a critical understanding of this paradox, as a social platform is both high-tech and high-touch. It cannot succeed without both, as technological inefficiencies will repel users and the attractiveness to its user base provides a competitive edge (i.e., a network effect). The Elon Musk takeover was symptomatic of a failure in the first two dimensions of DUAL (i.e., defining Twitter as an empathetic technologist and understanding that this paradox is front and center of its business model): By proactively assessing the implications, Elon Musk could have foreseen that a less empathetic, drastic takeover would likely infuriate employees, users, and investors. Doing so would risk scaring away critical employees—resulting in technological issues—and users, due to negative sentiment, changing policies, and the aforementioned technological issues. Moreover, by listening to market feedback (from both users and investors), Elon Musk could have used a DUAL approach, preventing his mistakes from the takeover earlier in the process and potentially preempting some of the later negative effects.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. Concluding remarks and implications

This article suggests that marketers need to occupy a variety of roles and continuously shift between them as circumstances change. Put differently, markets demand paradoxical marketers, yet most marketers are currently not ready to address this challenge. As such, we need substantial changes in practice, education, and research to enhance the preparedness for paradoxical marketing.

For instance, practitioners can use the four roles to anticipate future changes and redirect current activities to align with expected changes. For example, practitioners may want to engage in a form of role play, in which they momentarily take on the persona of one of the roles (like a thinking hat) to express how a specific role would

<sup>4</sup> Elon Musk Twitter Ownership Full of Firings, Ad Cuts, Chaos - Bloomberg and Elon Musk's Twitter is dying a slow and tedious death | Financial Times (ft.com)

<sup>5</sup> Elon Musk's Twitter is dying a slow and tedious death | Financial Times (ft.com)

<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing, the Twitter case is still unfolding and evolving.

interpret the near future of the marketplace. This would serve as a form of scenario planning, whereby different market scenarios are considered and potential responses are discussed to prepare the marketing team for the future. The DUAL roadmap provides a concrete structure to help guide these discussions.

Moreover, educators can utilize the four roles to structure courses, content, and teaching objectives. That is, the four roles can be utilized as a means for designing and teaching marketing courses, in which the roles can be expanded across numerous lectures to better understand each paradox and its challenges. In addition, courses could have a real-world representative practitioner from each role explain how they experience marketing from their angle. This would provide a much better explication of marketing paradoxes than is typically seen in generic marketing courses and textbooks.

Researchers may also utilize the four roles to direct future research. Each of the four roles comprises an interesting, overlooked path of novel research. As such, there is ample room for new studies in each of the four roles—both conceptual and empirical, drawing on qualitative and quantitative methods, and ideally conducted in collaboration with practitioners. One important avenue for future research, however, is to clarify and conceptualize the differences between the constructs of dilemmas and paradoxes in marketplaces. While both are important, dilemmas seem to be related to trade-offs whereas paradoxes are seemingly related to opposing tensions. Regardless, marketers face both. The bottom line is that the marketplace is becoming increasingly complex, fragmented, and paradoxical. Therefore, being market-driven requires paradoxical marketers.

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