

## TOURISM MARKET RESEARCH IN SPANISH HIGHER EDUCATION: ETYMOLOGICAL ISSUES

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*Tourism market research appears to have increased its academic presence with the introduction of the new university degree in Tourism in Spain. The term tourism market research is widely accepted. However, there is some controversy regarding the use of the terms of market research and commercial research. In some cases, conceptual differences are posed between the two terminologies, while in other cases, a greater equity is advocated. We try to understand the basis of these differences, concluding that the two terminologies have their own limitations, so it would be advisable to use a more appropriate and enlightening term..*

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### INTRODUCTION

In 1996 tourism degree studies were included in the Spanish higher education (HE) system, introducing a new period for training professionals in the sector and opening up new possibilities for research development in the tourism field (Cervera-Taulet & Ruiz-Molina, 2008). Following to Munar and Montaña (2009), when the Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999, Spain's HE system had three levels: the first level had 3 year programmes entitled *diplomaturas*, degrees that did not provide access to any upper HE level. All tourism studies in Spain belonged to this level. The second level, *licenciado*, had 5 to 6 year programmes and provided access to doctoral level. No tourism degree was offered at this level. The final level was that of *doctorate*. No doctoral degree in tourism was offered.



In Spanish Higher Education, Tourism Market Research has been an optional subject in the Curricula of the Tourism Diploma (*diplomatura*). The adoption of the European Higher Education Area seems to boost the participation of this subject in the new Tourism Degree. Specifically, the White Paper of the Tourism Degree, developed by the National Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (ANECA, 2004), proposes ten knowledge scopes that represent different academic approaches to tourism. A knowledge scope devoted to areas that may tackle the social or market research is indicated among them.

The subject Tourism Market Research has been given as a compulsory subject for the first time in the University of Seville in academic year 2011-2012. It is a compulsory subject because it must be taken by all the students registered in the Degree. It is a third year subject of the Tourism Degree and consists of 6 ECTS. The teachers of that subject are the authors of this paper. However, this subject is not included in every curriculum of those Spanish universities imparting the Tourism Degree. For instance, among the nine public universities of Andalusia, this subject is taught only in the universities of Cordoba, Malaga and Seville. That is, the subject is imparted in three of the eight universities that currently offer the Tourism Degree. The subject is compulsory in the three universities mentioned. In Spain, the subject is present in the curricula of less than half of the universities. We believe this subject should have a greater academic participation in Andalusia and Spain due to the transcendence of tourism in our country and the need for training the students and enhancing their interest in tourism research.

Tourism Market Research belongs to marketing discipline (defined in Spain, more specifically, as the area for commercialization and market research). The concept of tourism market research may be widely accepted by the academic community, but the term or nomenclature from which it comes reveals its inaccurate use. The linguistic root of that term in marketing literature is *market research*, although the term *commercial research* is also used. In tourism, when it is required to generalize, it may be more accurate to use the term *tourism market research* rather than *tourism commercial research* or *commercial research in tourism*. However, when this process of generalization is limited, the expression *commercial research of a tourism business* is perfectly valid. There is no doubt that the words *commercial* and *tourism* do not really match and require a greater linguistic distance in order to make them clearly understandable.

Obviously, the terms *tourism research* or *research in tourism* are misused for identifying the tourism market research. In this case, research

is referenced broadly, comprising any disciplinary or operation scope. The concept of *social research in tourism* also shows the same dilemma, although in a more restricted manner, since this type of tourism research refers to any discipline in the field of social sciences.

To this point, the question arises whether the term *tourism market research* is accepted in the academic community, especially due to resonance or appearance, or it is possible to spread its acceptance mainly for conceptual reasons. In this sense, this paper is focused on the etymology of *tourism market research*. That is, we intend to explore the origins of the term in order to explain, from a greater conceptual background, the reasons by which the terminology used may be accepted or rejected.

This study is an exercise of theoretical reflection, structured in the following epigraphs. First, we try to highlight the semantic divergence about the terms *market research* and *commercial research*. The following epigraph is focused on justifying the reasons of this divergence. And finally, in conclusion, we try to provide solutions that bring the different academic postulates closer.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As previously mentioned, the term *tourism market research* seems to have some consistence in the academic scope versus other similar terms, but we believe it is justified only by matters of form and not background. This is obvious considering the lack of consensus between the implementation of *market* and *commercial research*. In Spain at least, controversy raised between authors, researchers and specialists in the field, which is based on the different ways of understanding these two terms. This way, marketing literature in Spain frequently points out the dichotomy of identifying or not both terms as synonyms. Commercial research is proposed to include market research, but it is also accepted that both terms are concepts that cover the same or almost the same.

As we said, many prestigious Spanish authors, both academics and professionals, have shown their differences about equalizing the terms *market research* and *commercial research*. On the one hand, some authors claim that the concept of commercial research is wider than *market research*, as the last is focused only on knowing the target market (e.g., Miquel, Bigné, Cuenca, Miquel & Lévy, 1999; Pedret, Sagnier & Camp, 2000; Díez & Landa, 2002; Santesmases, 2004; García, 2005). So, for instance, Pedret et al. (2000) state that *commercial research* comprises the study of any problem or chance, no matter if a market is investigated

or not. In this case, performing a competition study could be an example, but there is no doubt that the market is the aspect organizations study the most.

On the other hand, some authors consider that *commercial* and *market research* are identical terms (e.g., Ortega, 1990; Ferré, 2003; Fernández, 2004; Trespalacios, Vázquez & Bello, 2005; López-Bonilla & López-Bonilla, 2012). In this case, it is stated that the concept of market is wider than that of target market. It must be highlighted that Trespalacios et al. (2005) defend the greater preponderance of the term *market research*, since, as they indicate, it is the original concept and it is generally used at an international scale.

These are the two positions clearly adopted in the marketing literature in Spain. The balance either favors the equality of both terms or gives more importance to commercial research. A third possibility is not arguable, as so would be that the concept of market research was wider than that of commercial research. Interestingly, a study performed by Landa et al. (2001) indicate that there are a slightly higher percentage of Andalusian managers who believe that market research is conceptually more encompassing than commercial research.

And why would we not think that market research may not be wider than commercial research? To do this, we can consider the differences between the words “market” and “commercial”. As we know, the market is the main core of attention of any organization in the development of a marketing activity in today’s world. Thereby, if an organization performs a study on its competitors, it is probable that the competitors analyzed are those who supply the same market to which that organization is directed to or intends so. If so, all “commercial” studies end up in the ocean of “market”. For instance, competitors or distributors are not studied separately without connecting them to the main body that is the current market or organization potential. In short, as Ferré (2003) suggests, the aim of market research is to obtain factual data about the market in any of its aspects.

Following to Butazzi (1970) and Ortega (1990), this divergence in the terminology used is greatly due to language. Interestingly, both authors hold opposing stances regarding the duality presented in the previous epigraph. So, for instance, Butazzi (1970) states that market research is a pointlessly restrictive expression that, according to the strict meaning of the word, it may refer only to market study.

The word *marketing* was admitted in our official vocabulary not long ago. In the nineties of the XX century, this word was still understood by the Royal Academy of Spanish Language as a voice of English origin that

was translated to our language as *mercadotecnia*. Besides, the marketing subject was initially gathered in the university curricula with the term *mercado* (market), which was later replaced by *mercadotecnia* until the term *marketing* was consolidated these days, as it is incorporated with more emphasis in the current undergraduate and postgraduate curricula.

As we know, the concept of marketing developed from the Anglo-Saxon, especially from the United States. But the apparent confusion we may have in our language does not seem to exist in the Anglo-Saxon countries. However, the Anglo-Saxon handbooks of marketing have been translated from a clear orientation toward the use of the terminology *market research*. This is evidenced by the Spanish titles of books from prominent North American authors like Malhotra and Burger (1997), Aaker and Day (1989), Kinneer and Taylor (1989), Malhotra (1997), Zikmund (1998) and Hair, Bush and Ortinau (2004). All these books include the English words *Market Research* in their original titles. Besides, the contents thereof are not limited exclusively to studies of the target market.

To this point, the question arises about which came first, commercial or market research. Which was the first term adopted? Where was it adopted? Perhaps looking over the history we may search for answers in greater depth. Sánchez, Mollá and Calderón (1999) performed an interesting study on the evolution and conceptual development of commercial or market research. Ten evolution stages are established in this study, which are divided in decades regarding the most relevant attributes. We believe other stages focused on the evolution of the terminology used could be added, in line with these stages of the development of the subject content. This way, we will establish four evolution stages, which are origin, transition, determination and reinforcement. In Table 1 we intended to summarize the main events that describe these four stages, marking them chronologically.

The origin of this concept appears in the 1910s. Specifically, Charles Coolidge Parlin was one of the pioneers as he first created, around 1911, a research department at the Curtis Publishing Company, which was known as the *Commercial Research Division*. Around the same time, Professor Duncan, from the University of Chicago, wrote the first important handbook about the subject, whose title was *Commercial Research: an Outline of Working Principles*. The transition stage of the terminology began in the 1920s. The concept of market as a key element for analysis grew in this decade. One of the main contributions in this period was brought by White in 1921, through his book *Market Analysis: its Principles and Methods*. In the 1930s, more important contributions were

brought by different authors, like Lazarsfeld in 1934 with his book: *The Psychological Aspect of Marketing Research* and Brown in 1937 with his book: *Market Research and Analysis*.

**Table 1.** Evolution stages of market research

STAGE	PERIOD	MILESTONE
Origin	1910s	Charles Coolidge Parlin (Curtis Publishing Company) creates a research department known as <i>Commercial Research Division</i>
		Prf. Duncan (University of Chicago) publishes a handbook named <i>Commercial Research: An Outline of Working Principles</i>
Transition	1920s	The idea of market as a key concept (White, in 1921, and others authors)
Determination	1930s	The <i>American Marketing Association</i> (AMA) is created in 1937. Introduction of statistical methodologies
Reinforcement	1970s	The concept of marketing widens (Kotler, in 1967, and others authors)

Source: own elaboration

Now, the determination stage may be located from the introduction of statistical methodologies in the academic literature, at the end of the 1930s. In this stage, a remarked milestone is the founding of the *American Marketing Association* (AMA), which represents a symbol in the development of the scientific literature used in marketing. With this endeavor, the Association published in 1937 a handbook named *The Technique of Marketing Research*, in which various relevant authors participate, like Wheeler, Balzari and Lazarsfeld. This period of determination may be justified also through the ideas of Zaltman and Burger (1980), who state that in the 1940s a subtle but important change occurred in the concept, which evolves from the term *market research* toward *marketing research*. The meaning of this change is justified by the greater research activity in the management environment, which is

directly related to the decision-making of the organization. This idea may be inspired on the book of Blankenship and Heidingfiels, 1947, named *Market and Marketing Analysis*, in which they distinguish market analysis from marketing analysis.

Last, a reinforcement stage must be highlighted from the boost and widening of the concept of marketing in the 1970s. Obviously, all the American authors mentioned before belong to this time (Zaltman & Burger, 1980; Aaker & Day, 1989; Kinnear & Taylor, 1989; Malhotra, 1997; Zikmund, 1998; Hair et al., 2004). However, there is no doubt that Philip Kotler should be included among the main spreading authors. Kotler's book: *Marketing Management* in 1967, as well as its successive editions, has become a classic in the marketing literature and also the most influential book in this subject, as confirmed by Professor Cruz in the prologue of the most recent Spanish edition (Kotler, Cámara, Grande & Cruz, 2003).

But the evolution of the terminology has its foundation in the United States, and not so much in Europe. In the European continent, the proliferation of studies and organizations related to the subject is appreciable from the Second World War. It is odd how in countries like France, Holland, Great Britain or Italy professional institutes and organizations appear, with the word *market* highlighted in their initials as the main element. However, the *European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research Association* (ESOMAR) was created in 1948, as an organization that protected the codes of ethics in applied research. It is possible that in Europe, as well as in other countries out of North America, the term *market research* may have developed in a special manner due to a slower evolution of the concept of *marketing*, mainly, as we observed in the stages previously mentioned.

The term *commercial research* seems to be more characteristic of Spain and its language. The use of this terminology may avoid confusion regarding the application areas involved in such research. However, the term *commercial research* is not so precise, especially considering the conceptual evolution of marketing. Since the 1970s, the concept of marketing involves a number of fundamental transformations, one of them being the growth of marketing activity toward all types of organizations, both lucrative and non-lucrative. In this sense, commercial research is more likely to be related to business organizations, while social sectors should also be considered.

Spanish and Spanish American authors do not have to adopt exactly the same words the Anglo-Saxon do in the theoretical or practical development of the subject. Of course we can use our own terminology,

but it is not advisable to put our own obstacles when moving forward in knowledge. It makes no sense that we create our own terminology attempting to facilitate comprehension and then the opposite happens, entering this dilemma. We know that *market* is the most relevant concept in marketing literature. However, the term *market* is not enough to assemble the whole concept of *marketing*, and this last term is already recognized in our language since not too many years. However, the term *market research* has taken deep root in the academic and professional tradition and keeps its linguistic strength. But, is it beginning to be obsolete? Or is it necessary to define its borderlines in more detail?

## CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the history evolution of *commercial research* and *market research*, we have extracted a semantic evolution of the terminology, in which we observed four stages. Obviously, these stages make more sense in the country where the concept of *marketing* originated and developed. At the first stage the terminology appears and the term *marketing* has no validity. In the second stage, known as “transition stage”, the concept *market* is emphasized. The third stage, known as “determination stage”, involves the differentiation of the terms *market* and *marketing*, being the last the most relevant. And finally, in the fourth, “reinforcement stage”, the terminology adopted must match the current dimensions of the concept of *marketing*. As we observed, these four stages are clearly distinguished in the United States but not in Europe. Perhaps in Europe, in general, the stages of “determination” and “reinforcement” are not definitely closed yet. Perhaps, as Tribe (2006a, 2006b) argues, tourism knowledge is still in a pre-paradigmatic stage.

Taking stock of this, we detected two clear directions in Spain regarding the use of the terminologies *market research* and *commercial research*. One of them could be called *translator's tendency*, and it is based on the belief that *market research* is the prevailing concept. The other direction, which could be called *adapter's tendency*, is based on the belief that *commercial research* is wider than *market research*. However, both directions show certain limitations.

Almost all authors, Spanish and non-Spanish, agree that the most commonly accepted definition of *market research* or *commercial research* is the one provided by the American Marketing Association (AMA) in 1987, which is the function that links the consumer, the client and the public to marketing managers through information. This is only the first part of the definition, but it is enough to appreciate that it



highlights the connection between two poles, which are the organization and its market. Therefore, all the information that an organization tries to obtain in order to make its marketing decisions comes from the market, directly or indirectly.

With certain doses of eclecticism, it may be assumed - taking a sentence of Suárez (1996) - that the terms *commercial research* and *market research* are close to being synonyms. Thus, we could think that it is not necessary to be so purist about the use of the language. Or maybe it is in this case? Thereby, we can go further in our will to reach a semantic consensus, guided by the words of Pedret et al. (2000), who estate that the concept of *commercial research* is as wide as the concept of *marketing* could be.

In this way, we have already adopted in Spain other terms with similar linguistic structures that suggest that the use of the adjective “commercial” is weak compared to the noun “marketing”; for instance, the concept of “plan de marketing” (marketing plan), “dirección de marketing” (marketing management), “sistema de información de marketing” (marketing information system) or “entorno de marketing” (marketing environment). Can we say that a marketing plan is wider than a commercial plan? And that marketing management includes commercial management? And that the marketing environment is greater than the commercial environment? At least, it seems to be. Confirming these conceptual differences is not enough for better understanding marketing, but they must also be appreciable at a glance.

On the other hand, an example of the formal differences between *commercial research* and *market research* appears in the area of tourism. In this case, the term *tourism market research* is clearly used in the presence of other similar terms due to the sound or aesthetics of the language.

The terminologies *commercial research* and *market research* present some deficiencies, as we intended to show. Thus, should we compare and decide which of the two terms shows greater deficiencies? It is not necessary; as neither of them is a precise term and this should be enough for us to adopt an eclectic attitude as we commented above: they are close to being synonyms. Or, they could rather start being synonyms in the Spanish marketing literature in the near future.

Collaboration between Anglo-Saxon and Spanish authors, from Latin-American or other countries, could be a good way of reaching a linguistic consensus, as it occurs in the book of Kotler et al. (2003). But, being purist about the use of the language, the most precise term would be *marketing research* or *tourism marketing research*. This terminology is

not widespread yet in the Spanish-speaking world, although it has been already used previously in the translation of some handbook (e.g., Dillon, Madden & Firtle, 1996) or in the work of some renowned Spanish author (e.g., Luque, 1997). In short, the use of this terminology may remove all the deficiencies observed in the terms *commercial research* and *market research*.

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