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MARKETING KNOWLEDGE USEFULNESS - IN A QUEST FOR THE USER PERSPECTIVE APPROACH -

APSTRAKT: Korisnost znanja sve više je predmet interesovanja u marketingu kao disciplini. Utvrđena su i obrazložena brojna ograničenja njegovih različitih aspekata, a predložena su i dobro osmišljena rešenja. Dalji napredak u ovom pravcu potencijalno je znatno veći u slučaju prihvatanja pristupa koji polazi od korisnika. U vezi ponašanja marketing menadžera, predstavljen je jednostavan koncept: prihvatljivost - cenovna pristupačnost – raspoloživost - svesnost. On preusmerava našu pažnju ka uglu gledanja menadžera i služi kao ilustracija veoma poželjnih mnogo složenijih radova. Predloženi razvoj vodi ka stvaranju i integraciji modela ponašanja koji se odnose na sve grupe stejkholdera znanja iz oblasti marketinga: menadžera, studenata, profesora i društva.

KLJUČNE REČI: Marketing znanje, korisnost znanja, menadžeri, marketing disciplina.

ABSTRACT: Marketing knowledge usefulness has been the object of increasing concern within the discipline. Numerous shortcomings of its various aspects have been identified, elaborated and accompanied with sophisticated solutions. Further progress in this direction is potentially much greater in a case of acceptance of the user perspective approach. In relation to the behaviour of a marketing manager, simple acceptability-affordability-availability-awareness concept is presented. It redirects our attention to the manager's point of view and serves as an illustration of highly desirable more complex works. Proposed development leads to the creation and integration of behaviour models specific to each group of marketing knowledge stakeholders: managers, students, academics and society.

KEY WORDS: marketing knowledge, knowledge usefulness, managers, marketing discipline

INTRODUCTION

The usefulness of marketing discipline knowledge is the topic which has been getting on importance during last decade. This is especially vivid recently, as it becomes more and more obvious that the discipline is entering the phase of serious challenges. Following the overall dominance of managerial approach, the focus is given on marketing managers - as a key group of marketing knowledge

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end-users. Other stakeholders that deserve much greater attention - like students and policy makers (Hunt, 2002) - are still the objects of minor interest. Nevertheless, significant shortcomings have been identified, ranging from mere communicational issues (McKenzie, et al. 2002), over the main aspects of the content of marketing discipline knowledge (Gummesson, 2002) – to production and dissemination problems (AMA, 1988). It is encouraging that they are accompanied with more or less elaborated alternatives, although their acceptance is far from being widespread.

On the other side, partial analyses, no matter how brilliant, have their own limitations. Therefore, what is still missing is the framework for integrative investigation of fundamental questions. Consequently, in an effort to contribute to the creation of these building-blocks, this work intends to: (a) present concise overview of the object of research, (b) capture, integrate and advance major issues and their solutions, and (c) depicts further topics of research.

The key hypothesis is that the user perspective approach offers great potential for deeper understanding of basic relations with respect to marketing knowledge usefulness. In this regard, simple acceptability-affordability-availability-awareness concept is used as a starting point. Desk research of influential articles, accompanied with informal interviews with senior managers of several successful firms in Serbia, constitute the methodological foundation of this explorative research.

MARKETING KNOWLEDGE

Various approaches have been used in knowledge definitions. Some authors strictly follow the principles of simplicity, while others offer detailed specifications - even including mathematics. Moreover, the differences go beyond complexity aspect and include (1) distinctions between data, information and knowledge, (2) objectivity/subjectivity issue, (3) empirical-inductive versus rationalistic-deductive direction, and (4) scientific status.

Although the purpose of this work is not basically to intervene into the debate on knowledge definition, opinions given in table 1 take an important supportive role for the explication of key ideas.

Table 1: Brief overview of basic knowledge terms

AUTHOR	DEFINITIONS, BUILDING-BLOCKS AND CLASSIFICATIONS
Aristotle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Knowledge implies that we know something and what we know “holds true”” Grønhaug, 2002, p. 365) • Implicitly emphasises scientific knowledge as a knowledge that “...has passed some rigorous test” (Grønhaug, 2002, p. 365)
Plato	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is “justified true belief“(Hunt, 1991, p. 297), which means “justified-with-certainty” (Hunt, 1991, p. 300)
Hunt (1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers counterarguments to Plato’s definition by emphasising uncertainty of knowledge, as well as its cumulative character (pp. 297-301)
Glazer (1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge means the same as information, which is recorded data in a give context
Grønhaug (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claims that Aristotle classification is not widely accepted today • “Today “knowledge” is often conceived as insights believed in and agreed upon” (p. 365) • Defines basic elements of knowledge: theories/models, concepts, methods/techniques, and facts
Nanaka & Teece (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information deals with the question how does the world really look like, while knowledge pertains to the issue of how the world works (p. 2)
Lilrank (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis the opinion of Nanaka and Teece • “...We can say that A and B consist of information about state or events, while their relation and its probability distribution is knowledge” (p. 693)...Data are the factual content of information. Meaning is a function of data and their context. This can be formalized as $M = f(D, C)$” (p. 694)
Sydänmaanlakka (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information = Data translated into meaningful entities; • Knowledge = Mutually integrated information, which eases decision-making
Ackoff (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding is much more valuable than knowledge, while the value of knowledge exceeds significantly the value of information

Madhavan & Grover (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate explicit knowledge (formalised, documented), and tacit knowledge (implicit, based on individual capabilities)
Quinn, Anderson and Finkelstein (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise four knowledge levels: Know-what, know-how, know-why, and care-why
Vargo & Lusch (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Knowledge is the fundamental resource of competitive advantage” (p. 9) • Classify knowledge as propositional (abstract, generalized) or prescriptive (techniques)
Gummesson (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is not cumulative. Old knowledge complies with old economy and should be used where it is appropriate; new knowledge brings paradigm shift)

Obviously, the list is not exhaustive but it could serve as a good approximation of extensive literature review. Note that, at first look, these proposals are more complementary than contradictory. Therefore, unresolved issue of the definition of marketing knowledge does not pose the problem in discussing its usefulness. Moreover, it potentially enriches the outcome - because of the wider space for many nuances immanent to both marketing managers and academics. Consequently, the principle of integration is more likely to be successfully implemented.

USEFULNESS

The concept of usefulness is crucial for this research. As stated by Grønhaug (2002), despite significant attention that has already been devoted to it, definite answer does not appear easily. He also stresses two helpful directions in this regard: different knowledge purposes (instrumental, conceptual and symbolic use) and different users (businessmen, politicians, and ordinary people).

Indeed, marketing discipline has multiple constituencies (AMA, 1988) or stakeholders with diversified needs (Hunt, 2002). Consequently, specific knowledge requirements come from the society in general - and from students, marketing professionals and academy, in particular. Principally, marketing knowledge is useful to the degree that it satisfies the needs and wants of its users.

Here, it is almost impossible to avoid the main message of marketing discipline: in order to be successful in your business – you should focus on your customers. Does this message pertain also to the marketing discipline itself? We

believe that despite certain efforts the answer is still “no”, although it should be “YES”.

Why “no” - and why “should be YES”?

“No” - because it is obvious that within marketing discipline community self-sufficient behavior prevails. This is:

- Indicated by research findings that uncover weak usage of marketing knowledge (e.g. AMA, 1988), and by reasonable, elaborated concerns of some leading authors (e.g. Rebstein, in: MSIR, 2001; Sheth, in: MSIN, 2002).
- Rooted in - or at least substantially strengthened by (1) long-term strong demand for basic business education/knowledge, (2) excessive state-provided financing, and (3) low level of perceived pressures that come from competitive fields (Piercy, 1999; Piercy, 2000).

“Should be YES” - because there lies the *raison d' être* of the discipline. If it is not focused on the customers, it could be useful partially - at best. And if it is useful partially - its existence is at stake. Moreover, could we advocate specific kind of general behavior that does not lead our own activities?

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

We strongly reaffirm an extension of “focus on customers/stakeholders” rule to the marketing discipline itself. It implies constant reassessment of marketing knowledge usefulness - starting from the customer point of view - which outcome determines the processes of knowledge creation and dissemination.

Of course, this idea is not new: many authors have been speaking in favour of “the user perspective” in relation to various aspects of knowledge (Menon, Varadarajan, 1992). At first look, Peter and Olson (1983) went even further by pointing out marketing nature of marketing theory itself, which implies careful design of all marketing-mix variables, not only the product (knowledge).

However, apparent implementation failure (or even implementation absence) raises the issue of more concrete activities which need to be undertaken. In this regard, instead of considering product, price, place and promotion, the first step toward the real customer-focused approach should redirect our attention to the concept of knowledge acceptability, affordability, availability and awareness (Sheth, in: MSIN, 2002, adapted). Having in mind the purpose and volume of this work, in forthcoming pages simple application of this idea to the behavior of marketing managers will be presented. Maybe this introductory attempt is quite cumbersome. Not surprisingly, the burden of supply-side view is still enormous. Nevertheless, it provides an elementary illustration of badly needed more complex works aiming at the creation of:

1. Customer/stakeholder behavior model for each group of key stakeholders: society, students, marketing professionals and academics themselves. We must advance the practice of emphasising pieces of one or few relations without their integration into “big picture” of how particular stakeholder really behaves. Well-developed consumer behavior models, like EKB (Engel, et al. 1993) could serve as the basis for this objective. Specifically, Menon and Varadarajan (1992) presented graphically ten variables (environmental, organizational and informational) which mutual links have been identified and elaborated. This pioneering but seminal contribution is encouraging, although it mostly pertains to organisational context.
2. Broad and integrative analytical framework or superstructure that encompasses individual models and their interactions, as well as offers the opportunity of easier integration of new ideas and research results. Analogy to the model proposed by Howard (1983) in his theory of the firm would be helpful. By balancing between complexity and vividness, details of broad forces of demand and supply cycle, customer decision model, strategic competition and product hierarchy are summarised into just one communicable figure. “The firm” that needs to receive this view is marketing as a discipline.
3. Coherent “world view”, which philosophically encompasses knowledge stakeholders modeling concept. General research orientation is usually not discussed and then accepted - but just received at the beginning of scientific work (Arndt, 1985; Burton, 2001). Therefore, this task seems to be the most complicated. At the same time, it is potentially the most fruitful, because in a case of occupying even a small fraction of researchers’ mental code – then the long-term efforts would be guaranteed.

On the other side, one could raise the warning: managerialism again! Yes, managerial approach is overemphasised in marketing (Hackley, 2001). In addition, serious doubts about the merits of customer-focused approach are also noticeable (Gummesson, 2002). Finally, any discussion about marketing philosophy risks dividing misunderstandings or even resolute refusal of the theme (Hunt, 2001).

Nevertheless, it is more likely that this work is just an application of the foot-into-door behavior modification technique. If we succeed in justifying the user perspective in relation to the subject which (presupposed) point of view pervades the whole discipline, then it would be much easier to:

- Gain wider acceptance for modeling the behavior of other stakeholders,
- Investigate the pros and cons of marketing concept applicability in general, and in knowledge use context in particular, and/or

- Reconsider the benefits of marketing-philosophy of science ongoing (but not over-heated) debate.

It is long way to go – so we go now.

4 A'S AT GLANCE

The most important characteristics of 4 A's application to marketing knowledge usefulness are specified in table 2. It represents an overview of the proposed framework which pieces are going to be elaborated in following pages. However, this table also carries the message which implications could hardly be over-estimated: it is the totality of 4 A's that matters – not the separated and isolated parts.

Table 2: 4A's of marketing knowledge

CRITERION	ASPECTS, PROBLEMS, SOLUTION INDICATIONS
ACCEPTABILITY	
1. Action-ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know-what, know-how and instrumental formats stand high, while conceptual knowledge is slightly less actionable. • Know-why knowledge needs more actionable corresponding outputs.
2. Importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing covers relevant research areas but some strategic issues are neglected (e.g. financial aspects).
3. Credibility/validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superiority of scientific method does not imply certainty of findings. • Implementation drawbacks of scientific work limit the validity of marketing knowledge. • Partial explanations seem to dominate in marketing as academic field.
4. Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situational factors may cause greater usage of marketing knowledge (e.g. high level of perceived task complexity and moderate urgency).
5. Purposes other than decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing knowledge is useful for defending and/or justifying manager's predetermined positions.

<p>AFFORDABILITY</p> <p>1. Counter-value</p> <p>2. Other costs</p> <p>3. Risk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monetary price is less affordable for small firms (consider barter). • Travel and waiting time are substantially reduced by the Internet. • Shopping time duration is potentially problematic, due to enormous number of knowledge products per each school of thought. • Performance time confronts with negative impact of knowledge comprehension difficulties (archaic language). • Actual product utility may fall bellow expectations. • Financial (i.e. functional) risk includes bankruptcy. • Psychological and social risks are strongly rooted in self-esteem needs and reference groups' influence.
<p>AVAILABILITY</p> <p>1. The ease of...</p> <p>2. The exclusiveness of...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good results are based on many forms used in dissemination process. • Article format change could increase the interest in academic journals. • Cheaper dissemination ways are preferred by small companies. • Competitive advantage requires marketing knowledge exclusiveness.
<p>AWARENESS</p> <p>1. Cognition</p> <p>2. Affect</p> <p>3. Connation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially important for limited problem-solving (leads directly to trial and purchase). • Better scores imply highlighted relevance of marketing knowledge, distinctive formats, alternative communication ways, and greater respect for manager's decision-making habits. • Managers seek for attributes that indicate the links between the knowledge and need satisfaction (i.e. decision-making). • Comparison with competitors' offers is getting on importance.

ACCEPTABILITY

Is the product of marketing discipline acceptable for any purpose regarding the manager's job? We think that basic drivers of manager behavior and their satisfaction means, as well as her/his decision-making habits, should be discussed before we focus on definite evaluation criteria and circumstances.

THE ROLE OF DRIVERS

What drives possible usage of disciplinary knowledge by marketing managers, or what drives managers - in general?

Complete adaptation of key motivational and cultural theories remains the target, but it is beyond the scope of this article. In short, relying on the experience of professor Nicholson (Emerald Now, 2004), the answer is simple: to make a difference, to exceed existing achievements, or to improve personal as well as family well-being. Naturally, there are also less ambitious managers who are concentrated more on satisfactory than exceptional outcomes. What is common to both groups is unambiguous sense that their action precedes their performance. So, the managers are strongly devoted to actions (Mintzberg, 1990), especially to those with proven records - like calling or visiting the customer. Moreover, alternative "lunch-golf-dinner marketing" is recognized as potentially useful approach even by Kotler (1991, p. 262), the leader of "classic" analysis-planning-implementation-control (APIC) agenda (Brown, 2002).

Marketing discipline knowledge is not an action, *per se*, or direct need-satisfaction mean. Therefore, managers are not basically concerned with it. This is the first and unavoidable obstacle for the discipline on its road to the key stakeholder.

DECISION-MAKING HABITS – BARRIERS IMPOSED BY “INCUMBENTS”

In order to act, managers need to make decision – to think, in other words. Unfortunately, thinking and reading are not widely accepted as a core manager's activities (Ackoff, 1997). Here lies the root of another barrier to the usage of disciplinary knowledge. Managers do not make decision as it is recommended by the discipline (Greenly, et al. 2004). In a case of repetitive low-involvement context, they choose easily. Concerning strategic issues, instead of complying with prescribed APIC approach, their decision-making processes are ill-structured, massy, intermittent, deeply locked into their brains (Mintzberg, 1990). In both situations managers rely heavily on their own instincts and intuition (i.e., tacit knowledge), as well as personal experience, and (in)tend to make decisions alone. The space for marketing discipline knowledge is still not open.

Certainly, there are situations in which managers feel that they cannot resolve the issue without support. Naturally, colleagues, professional and personal peers are the most trustworthy knowledge sources, so our academic field is not the choice, again. Moreover, strong procedural rules and/or real confidence sometimes (at least) direct managers to company's formalised structure of management information system.

If these helpful solutions are not perceived as sufficient, then marketing discipline could enter manager's evoked set of alternatives. But, negative image of disciplinary knowledge - as well as manager's own experience and attitudes of the same kind - could deter him/her from seriously considering it. Otherwise, the real potential of marketing discipline knowledge might come to focus. What merits are supposed to be uncovered?

ACTIONABLE KNOWLEDGE

Principally, managers are mostly interested in actionable, ready-to-use product, those that strongly substantiate one particular solution. Is that what she/he is going to find in the marketing discipline?

“Know-what”, “know-how”, prescriptive and/or instrumental formats satisfy this criterion to great extent. In offering them, we should be aware of confusing effects of contradictory knowledge products, like those found recently in strategic management literature. One academic group claims that exceptional performance requires concentration on the core business, while other favours the option of creative destruction of existing competences/achievements. Needless to say that both products are firmly founded on extensive research projects. But contingencies, or circumstances in which action-oriented knowledge is applicable, are important missing or neglected parts (Christensen, Raynor, 2003). Without them, disciplinary knowledge could hardly be perceived as truly acceptable.

Some authors understand that complexity of marketing processes does not predominantly comply with “cookbook lists of answers” or “rule-of-thumb solutions” (Engel, et al. 1994, pp. vi-vii). They offer conceptual knowledge, which is directed at influencing strategic thinking rather than substantiating particular course. This kind of knowledge is highly valuable because it brings new understandings of existing problems. But, from the user perspective it is less actionable. Furthermore, attitudes and experience are almost undefeatable strongholds of existing ways of decision-making. Research has shown how conservative these mental structures could be, even in a case of prominent managers (Grønhaug, 2002). However, we strongly welcome an intention of Engel, *et al.* (1994) to present theoretically sound conceptual knowledge in a way that is as much as practical: “As we have gained experience ourselves both in teaching and in practical mar-

keting strategy, our perspectives understandably have become modified...toward consistent use of the criterion, *what does this all mean on the firing line?*" (p. vi).

Finally, "know-why" and propositional knowledge formats, or "the context of justification" (Hunt, 1991), is of primarily concern in any scientific work. These knowledge-claims are the foundation for all other forms of knowledge, but also the least actionable output of the discipline.

IMPORTANT KNOWLEDGE SUBJECTS

"Does disciplinary knowledge pertain to the most important aspects of my job?" – is probably another manager's dilemma. Customer behavior and competitive dynamics are at the heart of the discipline, so the answer is presumably positive. But, curious manager could notice that marketing is rightly blamed for failing to concentrate on key strategic issues (Rebstein, in: MSIR, 2001; Sheth, in: MSIN, 2002). This might imply increasing knowledge acceptance by managers from operational levels, but for senior officials marketing as a field of academic research is becoming less relevant. The list is not exhausted by following anxious examples:

- Managers who are concerned with industrial marketing, physical distribution and agricultural marketing could hardly be satisfied, because these areas have been neglected or abandoned (Bartels, 1983).
- Services, quality and relationship are treated as special cases, not as the very essence of man's everyday life - and marketing management (Gummesson, 2002).
- Organisational aspect of marketing has gained limited attention - substantially below the level of its impact on marketing output. Even intensive organisational changes in industry have not caused significant developments in the discipline (Murray, et al. 2002).

It seems that we have forgotten that "any discipline grows under two conditions: a phenomenon that is highly relevant but has no theory" (Sheth, in: MSIN, 2002, p. 5). However, October 2004 issue of the *Journal of Marketing* shows that discipline has strong turnaround potential, by bringing the works which delineate the links between marketing decisions and financial performance (e.g. Rao, et al. 2004; Rust, et al. 2004).

CREDIBLE/VALID KNOWLEDGE

"Is it credible and/or valid?" - is the next question which comes to manager's mind in relation to product of marketing discipline. At first look, due to indisputable superiority of scientific method, every scientific field scores high on credibility imperative. Nevertheless, brief comment seems to be appropriate. Scientific realism implies that relations between variables are expressed as probabilities,

which means that there is no certainty in knowledge-claims (Hunt, 1991). On the other side, managers are like all other people: basically interested in certainty, or in other words – in inevitable need-satisfaction. So, the state of psychological tension remains, although not at the same level. Some marketing scholars and consultants try to overcome this by emphasising high probabilities of their findings, while other quite frankly speak about this unavoidable constraint: “We make no attempt to imply certainty when it does not exist in the real world” (Engel, et al. 1994, p. vi).

Furthermore, curious managers are in a position to find out that, due to some implementation drawbacks, validity of marketing discipline knowledge is partially constrained:

1. Research is not an exclusive basis for knowledge creation, because it is costly, and requires long-term cooperation of many scholars at distant location. Even the textbooks of leading authors have been written on the basis of assertion → persuasive logic → strong anecdote chain (Kinneer, 1999). From the manager’s point of view, this is just another (although respectable) person’s experience and/or way of thinking.
2. Research orientation and data-base are dominated by socio-cultural, economical, institutional and internal characteristics of the large manufacturing enterprise from western countries that operates in oligopolistic competition (Arndt, 1985; Burton, 2001; Day, 2000). Is it possible that knowledge which comes from this mental angle is valid for marketing managers of small service firms - or other cultures, countries, societies and economies?
3. Survey-based research findings are often treated as independent of non-response rate. For the explorative purposes this practice is tolerable (Gummesson, 2002). Otherwise, the manager might be thinking: “How could I rely on “scientific” procedure that does not equally respect the opinions of all respondents from scientifically chosen sample?”
4. Sketches – as the form of partial explanation that specifies basic factors/variables but not their precise relations - still dominate in marketing (Hunt, 1991). These products do not support managers very much. One could hardly believe that sooner or later any manager will not be able to articulate critical success factors on her/his own.
5. Links between variables are frequently misinterpreted as causal, no matter how apparent is the fact that their “true” nature is nothing more than the correlation. Huge number of data processed by powerful software containing sophisticated regression model mostly substantiate the correlation - not the cause-and-effect relation. Causality could rarely be found, although it is the most valuable type of explanation. Is it good for manag-

ers to accept the advice of the following kind: in order to fly, you should strap the wings with feather to arms and flap intensively – because of high correlation between this activity (of birds – of course) and flying (Christensen, Raynor, 2003)?

KNOWLEDGE PURPOSES OTHER THAN DECISION-MAKING

“Is this kind of knowledge useful beyond my need for better decisions?” - could become manager’s next dilemma. Due to certain reasons (like self-interest, egocentric need, and marketing myopia) managers sometimes try to defend or justify their positions (to themselves, stakeholders, customers) – rather than to uncover the best course (Lillien, et al. 1992). Disciplinary knowledge perfectly fits these situations. Its image of scientific and business expertise implies almost irrefutable status of manager’s arguments.

Do we feel comfortable about this – or not, or should we? Some authors suggest that we should respond to this kind of need (Weiers, 1988). In short: yes - “stand close to customers”, and then try to change them, eventually.

CONTEXT

There are also situational factors that could increase or decrease the acceptability of marketing discipline knowledge by marketing managers (Menon, Varadarajan, 1992). For example, higher levels of perceived task complexity are presumably associated with higher levels of probability of usage. If manager’s general attitude to the information acquisition is basically positive (“information lover” stage, Weiers, 1988, p. 40), then the chances are even higher. Counterforce is the urgency of need: the greater it is – the greater the manager’s drive for immediate action and the lower the probability of knowledge use. However, further analysis exceeds the objective of this work.

ALTERNATIVES

Finally, manager would ask herself/himself: “Are there other fields which products contain market knowledge that might help me?” Unfortunately to the marketing, the answer is “yes”. Strategic management, logistics, finance and accounting are among the most aggressive competitors, which borrow, take, or steal the themes that “naturally” belong to marketing. How do we stand against them, concerning “our” traditional research area? In brief, marketing is stagnant academic field that creates some new concepts occasionally – but not new paradigms (Rebstein, in: MSIR, 2001). This could imply that the discipline is over-superior, and with no visible threat on the horizon. Consequently, it doesn’t need to advance rapidly, or to advance at all. On the contrary, the real fact is that senior managers do not use marketing models for decision-making, but financial

and production planning models (Rebstein, in: MSIR 2001). “Marketing is going through a mid-life crisis” (Sheth, in: MSIN, 2002, p. 5), so the paradigm shift seems to be the only solution (Gummesson, 2002). Otherwise, we will not run through the test of acceptability.

AFFORDABILITY

In discussing this issue, we favour the approach of Murphy and Enis (1986). Simplified presentation of probable questions that manager would try to answer herself includes:

- 1) How much I should/must pay for this type of knowledge?
- 2) Are there some other costs in relation to this product?
- 3) What risks are associated with the disciplinary knowledge usage?
- 4) How do competitive disciplines influence affordability of marketing knowledge?

COUNTER-VALUE

It is not widely thought that this element could pose any kind of problem to marketing managers. In principal, the most of cash equivalents to knowledge products are closer to symbolic rather than significant value. Larger amounts (ten thousand and more) are rare and mostly related to special huge-scale research projects and leading consultancy services. In relative terms, all these figures look much smaller – or even hardly noticeable - to companies which revenues are measured in billions. On the other side, only 5% of all companies in Great Britain are large corporations (Day, 2000). Small enterprise managers perceive these monetary price numbers as much less affordable. Consequently, having in mind that this segment is under-researched in marketing, helpful solution is some form of barter arrangement: research support (surveys, data-supply, informal interviews etc.) in exchange for research findings. Small business research institutes and special interest groups would improve their research outcome by relying on this principle, as it already happened to Marketing Science Institute cooperation with big business.

OTHER COSTS

Time that is needed for travel, shopping, waiting and performance is supposed to be the key non-monetary aspect of knowledge affordability. Despite exceptional contribution of Internet – concerning travel and waiting time especially, marketing managers in small companies seem to strive against many difficulties. Shopping time could be endless, judging on the basis of number of textbooks and articles per each school of thought. So the simplification is inevita-

ble, and the discipline has done a great job by offering guides through a “jungle” of marketing theories (e.g. Sheth, et al. 1988). In addition, to reduce the number of managers’ alternatives further, we should continue to praise and promote the leaders of both specific subjects and general marketing.

The performance time reduction is challenging task, also. Managers’ understanding of even basic concepts, like market orientation, could differ significantly from intended meaning (Ottesen, Grønhaug, 2002). Knowledge product comprehension encounters significant language barriers which cannot be left behind by expelling polysyllabic words. Marketing discipline language is archaic (McKenzie, et al. 2002) and imprecise (McCarthy, in: Bartels, 1988, p. 254), so we should – at least - insist on (a) harmonising the definitions of existing terms, and (b) preventing the excessive proliferation of new ones (Kinnear, 1999, adapted). In this regard, it is encouraging that AMA web site enables free access to the dictionary of marketing terms. Furthermore, statistical models and extensive mathematics might be the necessity of any scientific field, but from the manager’s point of view their symbols and terms are not the part of her/his language. Consequently, verbally and graphically presented knowledge products (see Lillien, et al. 1992, p. 7) are better suited for affordability criterion of marketing managers.

RISKS

“What are the possible consequences if this purchase is mistake?” – is the question that inevitably follows high involvement buying decisions. In a case of knowledge product the link is probably even stronger. The simplest problem is a loss associated with perceived difference between amount paid and expected product utility. In this regard, it is important to clearly demonstrate financial effects of marketing knowledge. Recent literature developments that signify financial aspects of marketing decisions are of great supportive role.

Functional (performance) risk imposes highest level of burden on decision-making. Possible scale of negative effects of knowledge non-performance is determined by the strategic or tactical/operational nature of the decision which is in focus. However, it certainly includes complete organisational and personal bankruptcy. In this regard, marketing managers of small enterprises probably cannot afford even minor knowledge functional failure, because any loss could seriously jeopardise their financial results. The best that discipline can do is to (a) speak frankly about the probabilities and contingencies of its findings, especially in relation to the most actionable products, (b) concentrate on scientific work improvements, with emphasis on cause-and-effect explanations, which implies further integration of qualitative and quantitative research methods, (c) affirm the value of lower-risk products, like conceptual knowledge.

Other types of risk – psychological and social – are less important in comparison to functional. Nevertheless, self-esteem needs and reference groups influence manager's behaviour, so the branding and positioning of marketing knowledge seem to be the purposeful responses (Murphy, Ennis, 1986, p. 34, adapted).

COMPETITIVE PRODUCTS AND AFFORDABILITY OF MARKETING DISCIPLINE KNOWLEDGE

In general, competitive offers do not significantly differ from that of marketing discipline. Therefore, managers probably perceive competitive knowledge products as equally affordable. But, in relation to risk, we are lagging behind the financial discipline models. Contrary to our favourites, these knowledge products are widely used for decision-making (Rebstein, in: MSIR, 2001). Therefore, from the manager's standpoint, in a case of failure psychological and social risks are supposed to be lower. Moreover, financial models are more standardised and less ambiguous, so the comprehension time is potentially shorter. What should we do: to copy market leaders, to coop with market leaders, to wonder what happened or...?

AVAILABILITY

“Is marketing discipline knowledge easily available to me?” – is the next issue that manager would try to resolve. Of course, one could think that availability is not determining criterion, except in a case of high need urgency. Maybe this is true, but if “...manager wants support for his position...as soon as possible” (Lilien, et al. 1992, p. 10), then it would be better to respect the deadline.

At first look, with the assistance of Internet, any title is literary reachable within seconds. Moreover, broadband communications and powerful computer systems integrate dispersed knowledge components (George Day, in: Bolton, 2004). But, does it also mean that specific knowledge products are practically at hand? Generally speaking, the answer is positive, and it is insured by executives programs, consultations, daily trade press, periodicals, monographs and textbooks (Hunt, 2002). It is encouraging that many vehicles are being used for this purpose, because high intensity of dissemination forms implies high availability. Indeed, marketing managers like picture-full presentations, eye-to-eye consultations and specially designed executive programs. They also read trade press frequently, and some monographs and textbooks occasionally.

How to upgrade knowledge availability? First: having in mind the number and the financial strength of small enterprises, we should pay much greater attention to cheaper dissemination ways. Second: better planning is needed, also, contrary to prevailing “if-they-want-me-they-will-find-me” philosophy. For in-

stance: do we perform any kind of customer surveillance? Third: stand close to customers, stand close to customers...

Furthermore, we should reconsider the (underestimated) role of leading academic journals. The fact that marketing managers do not read these publications has been recognised as almost inevitable (McKenzie, et al. 2002), or even strengthened by argumentation that it is not necessary to include them into readership (Hunt, 2002). Maybe it really is not necessary, because academic journal contain articles which need further refinement – at least – to gain wider academic acceptance. But, why wouldn't we try to do something? For example, content accommodation in a form of additional or mixed size formats of 1/20 and/or 1/3 of the original have been found as positively related to knowledge understanding and rehearsal (Ackoff, 1997). If marketing knowledge scores high on acceptability and affordability criteria, then this dissemination vehicle should deserve proposed or some other kind of changes, no matter how utopian they might look - at this moment especially.

And, don't forget the exclusiveness. Managers may ask themselves (or even us): "Well, if this knowledge is available to all other people, how could I make a difference by using it?" Our answer (if any) would probably be close to one of the following:

- Look, buddy, take it - or leave it.
- (Inside): O, no! (Outside): Yeah (fragile smile)...This knowledge is very important. Really... (Proudly) It is firmly based on extensive scientific research.
- Yes, you're right. No difference could be achieved: this knowledge is the must for staying in a market race.
- Yes, you're right. It is true that this general marketing knowledge is available to other managers. But, how many of them would really buy this knowledge product, and how many of those who buy are going to use it, and how many of those who are going to use it will do the job properly? In addition, we could deliver to you exclusively the knowledge specific to your particular case. It takes no more than few hours/days/weeks.

What is the most likely response?

AWARENESS

On the basis of the concept that we follow, in the headline of this section the emphasis is given on initial phase of attitude formation, but actual complexity of communication processes is probably much greater. Exposed to our message, marketing managers would try to answer themselves following questions:

- 1) (Cognition): What is this?
- 2) (Affect): What does this kind of knowledge really mean for me?
- 3) (Connotation): How to behave: to buy, to postpone, to ignore...?

Therefore, we extend this issue to all other phases, including knowledge, liking, preference and trial.

However, it really is of primary importance to gain awareness, because it means opening the gates of manager's mind. Sheth (in: MSIN, 2002) makes helpful comments by:

- Favouring one effective rule: first publish in leading business press – then in academic journals;
- Using analogy to the work of Centres for Disease Control, which “market research” results easily find their place in media. Consequently, it is the relevance of marketing discipline findings, as well as perceived competence of marketing academics, which basically insures media coverage – and customers' attention, subsequently.

Furthermore, what about our effort to gain survey responses at conferences? That is very rare opportunity to gain attention for subsequent research findings, also. Unfortunately, in practice, this activity has been transformed into exhausting attacks on our supposed audience. In relation to large business managers the solution is some kind of coordination within marketing discipline community, while for the small business direct payment is more appropriate (Bednall, 2002).

Are the managers aware of marketing discipline knowledge? In principal, the answer is predominantly positive, but the awareness seems to be more general than specific - with respect to particular knowledge-claims. How could managers' attention become more open to marketing discipline offer? If we are honest, the basic principles found in general marketing textbooks must be appropriate for this task. Let's exploit them.

In brief, people are better aware of information which is: (1) related to their needs and wants (2) significantly different from existing formats, (3) anticipated or expected (Kotler, 1991). Consequently, in order to widen managers' exposure and attention to marketing discipline we should: (a) highlight the relevance of our findings, (b) offer distinctive knowledge formats, like those proposed in availability section, and (c) express our full respect to manager's mental habits and patterns.

What is going on during affective phases? In general, managers are looking for: (1) direct links between knowledge product use and need-satisfaction, and (2) the attributes of that knowledge which substantiate its need-satisfaction capacity. To comply with this approach, we should present clearly: (a) how actionable the product really is, (b) the nature of the links between variables (correlation or causation), as well as their information base (persuasive logic/strong anecdotes

versus research projects findings), and (c) extrinsic attributes of product quality (Zeithaml, 1988), like author's credibility.

As we are approaching the phase of connotative responses, competitive comparison is getting on importance. "Experience" attributes, or their surrogates (like other people's satisfaction/belief and manager's own experiences with similar products), are becoming highly influential. Finally, during the trial and purchase knowledge affordability and availability close the choice criteria set.

We have assumed hierarchy-of-effects model in full scale. However, some well-known observations seem to challenge this approach, especially those regarding the order of phases, their sequential flow and even existence (Nylen, 1990). Therefore, our first task is to uncover the real facts about the attitude formation process and its link with definite decision. Principally, knowledge usage is associated with serious consequences, which might imply the dominance of extended problem solving. On the other side, managers of small enterprises are under the constant pressure of information overload and insufficiency of resources. Therefore, they are practically forced to follow limited problem solving agenda. This again reaffirms the importance of awareness phase, because it is not just one that is inevitable but also directly connected to the trial and purchase.

THE CHECKPOINT

Do we have anything adequate for our customers? What about our top products; do they meet the 4 A's requirements? One could argue that this is the relict of supply-side view, but let alone our clients for a moment. Look at the mirror: table 3 contains the most known substantive knowledge of marketing discipline, valued against 4 A's criteria.

Table 3: 4A's valuation of substantive marketing knowledge

	ACCEPTABILITY	AFFORDABILITY	AVAILABILITY	AWARENESS
	+++ 0 ---	+++ 0 ---	+++ 0 ---	+++ 0 ---
Marketing concept	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Segmenting	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Positioning	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON

Product Life cycle	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
New Product Development	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Consumer Behavior Models & Theories	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Theories of competition	IMP ACT C/V CON OP	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Advertising theories	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Distribution theories	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Diffusion and new product adoption theories	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Causal models	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Simulation and marketing games	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON
Decision-making Models	IMP ACT C/V OP CON	CV R OC	EAS EXC	COG AFF CON

LEGEND: IMP = Importance CV = Counter-value EAS = The ease of... COG = Cognition
 ACT = Action-ability R = Risk EXC = Exclusiveness AFF = Affect
 C/V = Credibility/Validity OC = Other Costs CON = Connation
 OP = Other Purposes
 CON = Context

Good news! The vast majority of sub-elements are located on the plus side of accompanied scales, which means that overall score is more affirmative than disappointing. On the other side, bad news is that this table hides probably the most relevant information indicated by knowledge demand trends: competitive disciplines perform better.

If you disagree with the table in general, or in particular - regarding at least one assessment - that's encouraging. Its main purpose is not a conformance, neither with the reality nor with prevailing attitudes. It is designed to be provocative enough to trigger the action. So, take a pencil or pocket PC and note your own estimates and comments. Do not hesitate to go further - indicate the importance of each sub-element of 4 A's, as well as the implications of their mutual interactions. In addition, include other knowledge components, or offer simpler or more complex version of 4 A's framework. This is the way by which we could gradually realize that judgement approach needs partnership. Then, the most productive extensive research projects will emerge as a natural part of everyday activities of marketing discipline community.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

Keep in mind the following story about knowledge usefulness: The bottle is normally opened at its neck, and its bottom is turned to the source of light. The honeybee is in the bottle, and it tries to come out by following quite logical (and maybe scientific) rule: where is the light - there is the way out. It tries persistently, but without success: each attempt ends in clash with strong physical barrier of the bottom. Finally, extremely exhausted, it dies. The fly that is in the same situation behaves in unsophisticated trial-and-error mode. But, sooner or latter, it (by chance) finds the way out (Mincberg, et al. 2004, p. 188, adapted).

Yes, there is no conclusion. We are still at the beginning, so it's too early to start thinking about it. Or this article as a whole is just a metaphorical summary of many previous contributions. Whatever: let's think, write and do something about the user perspective approach to marketing knowledge usefulness.

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