

Ouverture de 'Marketing Research and Global Markets'

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Abstract

Global markets express a new vision of market research and of marketing research, consistent with the information needs of complex organisations (generally network-based) working with several decision-making points (characterised by high-level delegations and responsibilities) and with very brief action-reaction times.

Marketing research and market research represent two distinct information support domains for corporate management, with well-defined theoretical and practical limits.

Market research concerns, on the one hand, uncontrollable environmental phenomena (such as demographic and social composition and trends). On the other, it regards influenceable environmental phenomena (e.g. overall product consumption trends, degree of competition, distribution channels, etc.).

On the contrary, marketing research tends to develop when increased competition obliges a company to perform analysis of market opportunities and threats. In general terms, marketing research can be defined as the systematic collection and analysis of relevant quantitative and qualitative data and information for a specific marketing situation that a company must face for product, price, place and promotion.

Keywords: Marketing Research; Market Research; Global Markets; Global Competition; Price Competition; Economies of Scarcity; Push/Pull Policy; Dynamically-Balanced Markets; Shelf Policies; Over-Supply; Producer Shelf Policies; Retailer Shelf Policies

1. Overture

Global markets create new frontiers for competition and radically change temporal and spatial competitive relationships; specifically those linked, on the one hand, to time-based competition and, on the other, to the abandonment of closed domains deriving from particular physical or administrative circumstances (a country, region, geographical area, etc.)

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Globalisation overcomes any static or delimited notion of competitive space. As a result, specific geographical contexts are required to exhibit unique, partial, competitive advantages (regarding production, marketing, R&D, etc.), which can be coordinated within a revenue-earning and operational company system (market-space management).

Globalisation forces a company to have at its disposal a wide range of spaces and objects in order to make comparisons. It also simultaneously presupposes an information system consistent with very short-term decision-making: a system based on electronic data flow and open communication processes (as opposed to the traditional one-way processes from sender to passive receiver).

In particular, global markets express a new vision of *market research* and of *marketing research*, consistent with the information needs of complex organisations (generally network-based) working with several decision-making points (characterised by high-level of autonomy and responsibility) and with very brief action-reaction times¹.

2. Marketing Research, Market Research & Global Markets

Marketing research and *market research* represent two distinct information support domains for corporate management. Such domains have well-defined theoretical and practical limits, whilst the current nature of global markets and over-supply help to specialise them still further in terms of their respective information-based roles and tasks.

□ *'Market research has often been called marketing research, and there has been much confusion about what is market research and what is marketing research. Some writers have been so worried...that they have even called their books 'research for marketing decisions' to overcome the problems'*².

Market research actually dates back to the dawn of industrialisation – about 50 years before *marketing research*. According to the best-founded theories, it infers a physical reference space where the company can carry out research into its *macro environment* (political and institutional, regulatory, demographic, social, environmental, cultural, economic, technological, import/export geopolitical context) and study the *operating environment framework* (final demand and consumption, intermediate demand, competition, distribution channels, suppliers) relevant to the company's precise range of products or services.

□ *'One of the major information tasks is to measure the size of the overall market and its geographical breakdowns and forecast future sales and profits. These market measures and forecasts become key inputs into deciding which markets and new products to focus on'*³.

Therefore, *market research* concerns, on the one hand, uncontrollable environmental phenomena (such as demographic and social composition and trends) which companies acquire information and data about from external organisations (institutions, authorities, *market research* firms, etc.) whenever there

is a need for specific knowledge. On the other, it regards influenceable environmental phenomena⁴ (e.g. overall product consumption trends, degree of competition, distribution channels and systems, etc.) which companies generally acquire very precise information about from specialised external sources on a continual or occasional basis⁵.

□ *'A well-managed company develops strategies and the plans for their implementation first having thoroughly analysed its markets. Effective market analysis begins with an understanding of the broad market indicators that influence the opportunities for all businesses. We will be looking at each market category in terms of its demographic (population characteristics), geographic (location), and economic (buying potential and rates of change) indicators. Considered together these indicators are useful in estimating market potential, forecasting sales, laying out sales territories, and targeting advertising and sales promotional effort'*⁶.

□ *'Before investing, the collection of information is initiated by the producer in order to identify the buyers' needs and wants which constitute an attractive opportunity for him or her (market research). Similarly, the potential buyer (mostly industrial) initiates a study of the possibilities offered by suppliers and invitations to tender (sourcing research)'*⁷.

In corporate development, *market research* identifies macro-trends on the market and related opportunities and threats, showing the extent and intensity of changes for purposes of adapting corporate culture, strategies, structures, and systems⁸.

On the contrary, *marketing research* tends to develop when increased competition obliges a company to perform much more in-depth and closely-defined analysis of market opportunities and threats by carrying out continuous quantitative and qualitative studies of the so-called marketing action parameters (product, price, place and promotion).

□ *'Marketing research really began to grow when firms found they could no longer sell all they could produce but rather had to gauge market needs and produce accordingly. Marketing research was called upon to estimate these needs. As consumer discretion became more important, there was a concurrent shift in the orientation of many firms. Marketing began to assume a more dominant role and production a less important one'*⁹.

In general terms, *marketing research* can be defined as 'the systematic planning, collection, analysis and presentation of relevant data and information gathered for a specific marketing situation that a company must face'¹⁰.

□ *'Marketing research often has important implications for functions other than marketing. For example, research results on the changing mood of the market vis-à-vis ecology may induce R&D and production staff to develop environmentally sounds products. Similarly, sales*

*forecasting is a key input for financial analysis and for distribution planning and logistics*¹¹.

Specifically, *marketing research* is carried out in the following areas:

- product research, related to new product launches, improving current products, or even to product packaging and decoration, with analysis focused on: product concept testing; customer use tests; market tests; segmentation analysis¹²; product positioning & mapping; brand equity; and brand awareness & image¹³;
- pricing research, typically with studies of: cost/quality analysis; value analysis; and price bidding;
- communication research, with analysis into: content research; media research; and communication effectiveness research;
- distribution & sales research, with studies into: channel research; sales management research (targeted at personal selling tasks); sales target analysis (regarding the assessment of sales and promotion programme target and results¹⁴); and merchandising & cornering research.

3. Price Competition, the ‘Push/Pull Dilemma’ & Shelf Policies: The Changing Role of Marketing Research & Market Research

Today, *marketing research* and *market research* have objects, methodologies and research times that may differ significantly depending on the competitive intensity of reference markets. As such, the distinctive characteristics of *market research* and *marketing research* can be studied with reference to the following competitive conditions:

- price competition; referring to economies of scarcity ($D > S$), and dominated by monopolistic markets;
- the ‘push/pull dilemma’; i.e. markets in static oligopolies, where conditions of controlled competition exist and where supply and demand are in dynamic balance ($D \cong S$);
- shelf policies; i.e., policies that evaluate product positioning on the shelf, and which refer to global markets with excess product supply ($D < S$).

3.1 Price Competition & Market Research

Economies of scarcity ($D > S$) exhibit overall unsatisfied demand due to the fact that production capacity is kept below total demand. The monopolistic (or quasi-monopolistic) position of suppliers allows them to control requested volumes by setting the selling price and deciding the quantity produced and sold (price competition). In this context, the physical features of products predominate, and consumers assess and appreciate the intrinsic quality of goods. At the same time, customer demands are basic, well known, and absolutely stable; technological innovation is rare and introduced onto the market with timing and methods independent of any form of competitive pressure¹⁵.

Scarcity of supply and the lack of alternatives stimulate indirect competition, whereby different product classes satisfy the same type of need. The extremely

limited competitive interdependence of scarcity markets is also sustained by the typically local activity of companies and by the direct control that producers exercise over distribution channels, which consequently play a passive role in manufactures-retailers contractual relations.

In economies of scarcity, the proximity of production and consumption creates a range of available products where there are few alternatives; all can be assessed and evaluated by consumers in relation to their 'intrinsic worth' (i.e. based on tangible aspects, the existence and extent of which can be verified by consumers directly). 'Demand' is prepared to purchase, and consists of an indistinct group of individuals with similar consumption patterns and behaviour and stable in its expression of needs¹⁶.

In economies of scarcity, marked by simplicity in their supply and reduced competition¹⁷, *marketing research* as such is absent by definition due to the monopolistic (or quasi-monopolistic) nature that characterises business. On the other hand, *market research* plays a key role in controlling competitive dynamics (to prevent the entrance and/or limit the growth of direct competitors), alongside 'inside information' generated by the accounting system and other forms of analysis.

In economies of scarcity (with production and consumption in close proximity and, moreover, dominated by direct personal relationships in the production-distribution-consumption system), *market research* investigates strictly production and consumption phenomena whilst the distribution function is not subject to detailed analysis given that it derives from - and is consequently controlled by - production. Therefore, *market research* is carried out, on the one hand, to control direct production factors (raw materials, labour, capital), which determine the effectiveness and efficiency of production processes (and thus the direct cost of production, i.e. the determining factor in price competition) and, on the other, to understand the essential characteristics of primary demand, with specific reference to demographic and social trends (births and deaths, immigration and emigration, composition and age of families, etc.), earning potential and, especially, production consumption potential.

Market research therefore aims to acquire information for the purposes of maintaining the basic conditions of an economy of scarcity, ensuring the maintenance of the most favourable 'pro tempore' production conditions and simultaneously defining quantitative volume and aggregate demand and consumption trends in order to determine the selling price and the quantity to make available. As such, and when faced with specific corporate information requirements, research tends to use important external sources or tailor-made studies to obtain primary and detailed summary information and data on the issues and phenomena in question.

3.2 The Push/Pull Dilemma, Market Research & Marketing Research

In markets where supply and demand maintain a dynamic balance (D~O), sales are the critical function of any company activity (marketing-oriented). This is drastically different to economies of scarcity, where business decisions are production-oriented. In addition, production, trade and consumption become mass processes and markets extend beyond 'close proximity' to, first of all, national and then, international borders. Lastly, trade assumes an active independent role in the

face of producers and consumers; progressively increasing negotiating strength with regard to producers and decision-making ability with regard to end user choices.

In general, dynamically-balanced markets exist where public involvement in the economy is consistent and geared towards maintaining the competitive conditions of a static oligopoly, i.e. the conservation of a competitive status quo by safeguarding a relatively closed system and controlling timing and methods for the spread of innovation.

Therefore, dynamically-balanced economies represent, for a significant number of companies, differentiated ranges of products or services in direct competition among themselves (there are different products – or better still, there are different brands – in the same product class to satisfy the same need), with a lesser degree of competitiveness and slowly-growing, or, more precisely, controlled markets that optimise system profitability by maintaining a dynamic balance of total supply and total demand. In dynamically-balanced economies, the overall economic and social well-being produced by a welfare state that regulates competition creates consumers with divergent characteristics and preferences, and who manifest this divergence by firm differences in their purchase behaviour (in demand segments). Overall demand is therefore not uniform, and can be segmented using specific parameters (demographic, sociological, psychological, etc.) to determine categories of potential consumers who, to a greater or lesser extent, may be sensitive to a company's sales initiatives. Such initiatives typically include: advertising; margins granted to trade; short-term price positioning; POS promotions, etc. In line with the goals of rapid growth for highly differentiated consumer products, oligopoly-based dynamically-balanced markets pursue 'non-price competition' policies (usually with an emphasis on advertising). These aim to increase product sales and profits by leveraging promotional costs (instead of the sales price, with permanent *erga omnes* changes, as put forward in the section on price competition in economies of scarcity).

Dynamically-balanced economies boast effective mass production facilities and extensive, aggressive business organisations. As a result, there is no demand segment left dissatisfied if speaking purely in terms of product availability (as can be seen, by definition, in monopolistic economies of scarcity). Products are numerous and differentiated to satisfy a wide range of potential customer expectations (segments), and numerous competitors offer products with similar basic functions but with highly differentiated accessory features (which, along with the product's intrinsic features, help determine consumer choices). The divergence in demand is also an expression of divergent expectations with customer satisfaction linked to perceptions of a multidimensional and unstable 'overall value' in the product offer. This 'extended product' is a combination of intangible and tangible factors and therefore generates a 'naturally' unstable balance between supply and demand. Indeed, any equilibrium tends to fail as a result of actions/reactions performed by competitors with the express purposes of changing consumer awareness (above all, the highly volatile perceptions) and - thus - choices in specific demand segments¹⁸.

In dynamically-balanced economies, the central importance of sales to company success highlights the essential role of marketing in the forecasting and management of demand segment trends. Consequently, *market research* (indispensable in order to learn about evolving trends in the reference macro-

environment – even if slow and controlled by public involvement, and consisting of: demand/consumption; customers/suppliers/trade channels; direct/indirect competitors) must be integrated with *marketing research*, i.e. with monitoring focused on product perceptions expressed by a given demand segment and with reference to various marketing action parameters (product, price, distribution, and advertising). Moreover, the criticality of sales reflects on the role and functions of distribution channels. As a result, trade takes on an active role in relations and negotiations with brand producers, and may even dictate conditions to producers that boast only ‘weak brand’ products¹⁹. Furthermore, trade progressively increases company size, experimenting with the first network organisations. Finally, it changes its functions from passive sales terminal to point of contact with consumers, able to check consistency regarding expectations, perceptions, and the satisfaction levels of the final demand.

The fundamental nature of production-distribution relations, typical of dynamically-balanced contexts, is confirmed in the so-called ‘push/pull dilemma,’ in which manufacturers dialogue with distribution companies (especially large and self-service retailers) with regard to medium-long term company development.

The push/pull dilemma reveals the different sensitivity to marketing shown by manufacturers and emphasises the importance - including trade - of a demand-based orientation (retail marketing). It distinguishes the growth of modern retail firms from traditional shops. Last but not least, it shows how *market research* and *marketing research* assume critical importance for manufacturers and retailers alike, although obviously with specific contexts, goals, and contents²⁰.

The push policy envisages that it is the selling intermediaries, primarily retailers, who ‘push’ the product to the end consumer, both by a favourable display on the shelves in the point of sale, and by recommending the purchase of specific products and brands (Figure 1). This policy presupposes that manufacturers offer precise and continuous incentives to retailers (usually with elementary advantages, such as larger sales margins than those granted by competitors, exclusive sales zones, etc.) and maintain continuous contact and relations through their sales force.

In a push policy context, a producer concentrates its sales force efforts and promotional activities on inducing retailers to offer, promote, and sell the product to the final consumer. This policy finds a practical concrete application when the distinctive features of the product are not known, when the choice between the different brands is left to the retailer, and when brand loyalty is very low and is not a decisive factor in repurchase.

□ *‘In a push strategy, the bulk of the marketing effort is devoted to incentives directed to wholesalers and retailers to induce them to cooperate with the firm. The objective is to win voluntary co-operation by offering attractive terms of trade, that is larger margins, quantity discounts, local or in-store advertising, promotional allowances, in-store sampling, and so on’²¹.*

The pull policy envisages that it is the end consumer, on the basis of his own motivation, who chooses the product on sale at self-service outlets directly, or expressly asks for the product from the retailer in traditional shops (Figure 1). This policy presupposes that manufacturers allocate large resources to persuasive communication tools (primarily advertising) in order to achieve a high degree of

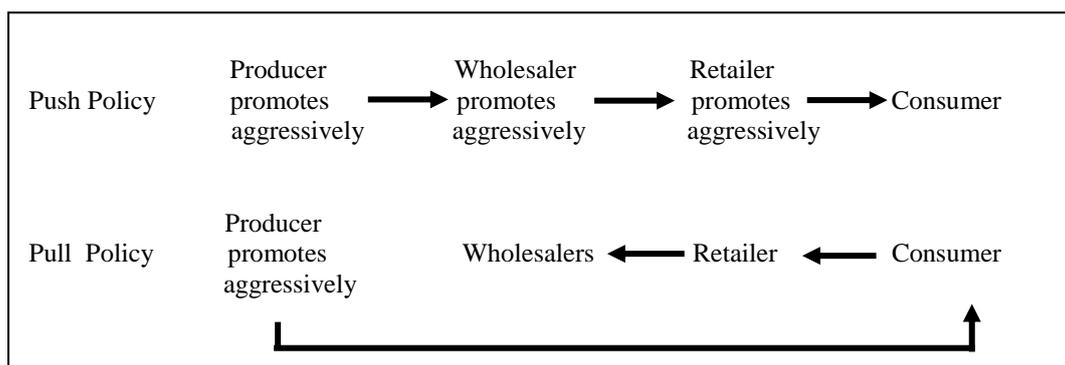
brand awareness and a highly distinctive image. The product is therefore requested - or 'pulled' - by the end user, with retailers obliged to make it available to consumers and, most of all, stock it as part of their product mix. Advertising replaces the sales organisation in basic communications and selling functions, while simultaneously performing more sophisticated competitive functions such as:

1. Stabilising consumption in space and time. Advertising permits the planning of non-personal and standardisable (mass) trade communications with lower costs than personal, push policy communications.
2. Increasing brand loyalty by creating and extending the producer-final consumer relationship (typical of the pull policy but absent in 'price competition' policy and 'push policy').

The pull policy therefore finds a practical concrete application when the point of sale offers numerous products with different brands for the same use, when final consumers perceive differences between various brands and their choice is usually made before entering the point of sale, and when brand loyalty is very high and often a decisive factor in repurchase.

□ *'When adopting a pull strategy. the objective is to create strong consumer demand and brand loyalty among consumers. To achieve these objectives, the manufacturer will spend the largest proportion of its communication budget on media advertising, consumer promotions and direct marketing efforts aimed at winning end-customers preferences. Pull strategies imply in general large financial resources to cover the costs of brand image advertising campaigns. In fact, a pull strategy must be viewed as a long term investment. The goal of the firm is to create a brand equity, around the company name or around the brand'²².*

Figure 1: Push-Pull Policy



Source: P. Kotler, Marketing Management. Analysis, Planning, and Control, 5th ed., cit., p. 630.

In brief, in economies where supply and demand are dynamically-balanced, *marketing research* is developed for competitive purposes by industrial companies

and wholesale and retail organisations alike, albeit with different research goals and profiles. In addition, *marketing research* presents short-medium term information validity horizons linked to the frequency of promotional activity, the degree of competition and restrictions imposed by regulations governing competition. On the other hand, *market research* offers medium-long term validity of information, represents the basis for assessing the context point of reference, and may also be used to express concise opinions as to the effectiveness and efficiency of previous company actions (thus, advertising ‘share of voice’ indicates the competitive pressure experienced in the past, whereas market share expresses sales success achieved in defined contexts). In general, *market research* and *marketing research* have a common research base, which is used to extract historical data and to forecast behaviour and trends in stable markets.

3.3 Shelf Policies, Marketing Research & Market Research

For more than a few years now, globalisation and digital communication technologies have been contributing to lead many markets into conditions of over-supply ($D < S$), i.e. with the consumption of certain goods no longer able to grow in line with quantities produced and/or imported, not even with falling prices.

The structural excess of production capacity in markets where there is over-supply leads to a situation in which production has diminishing direct costs. The situation is made even more critical by computer-based communications, which impose pressing work schedules on competitors (time-based competition) and produce: rapid imitation; accelerated technological innovation; global spread of innovation; and price slumps. Under such conditions, long-term company growth depends not so much on sales volumes or on the distinctive features of specific products (easily imitable in terms of tangible aspects and with intangible assets marked by extreme volatility in marketing costs), but rather on the degree of sophistication of corporate intangible assets²³.

In conditions of over-supply, the correlation between goods produced and sold becomes complex and involves: *goods sold*, i.e. goods purchased by final demand at a price significantly higher than the direct variable cost of transaction; *goods unsold*, i.e. goods purchased by the intermediate channel of demand but which failed to overcome the full-price selection phase between the various alternative brands and which must therefore be offered at a discounted price for brief periods, up to the limit of the direct variable cost of transaction – in order to contend competitively in the purchase selection process between different product classes; and lastly, *unsellable goods*, which in reality cannot be sold even at prices below the direct variable cost of transaction. Clearly, the ability and real opportunity to minimise this final state of affairs determines the profitability of any given product or service range and, in a broader sense, shows the extent to which a given organisation is able to position itself on the market.

The competitive conditions in a situation of over-supply are characterised by:

- *competitive trade*²⁴. Commercial intermediaries participate in the transaction chain with an independent role which, on the one hand, is expressed in their choice of partnerships with certain suppliers and, on the other, in brand portfolio policies, ranging from private labels to own brands (retail marketing). Other non-commercial intermediaries (financial brokers, tour operators, real estate brokers, etc.) contribute to sustaining – and at times

developing – transaction chains characterised by the brand policies of producers and distributors, with the underlying idea that competitive advantages obtainable in intermediate markets are more sustainable than those obtainable in consumer markets. The latter are dominated by the intangible nature of supply and accelerated dynamics in meeting ‘demand bubble’ requirements, which have to be understood, forecast, seized, abandoned and renewed with the help of customised marketing tools (such as merchandising and licensing);

- *pull trade & consumer policy*. Reasons behind final demand preference derive from coordination between: the pull policy exercised by producers, a sophisticated push policy (also exercised by producers, where trade incentives are, however, part of a more complex trade marketing policy), and pull activities exercised directly by trade with regard to the final buyer. The condition of over-supply overcomes the elementary state of competition among goods and creates complex consumption situations (i.e. choices between different consumption uses, such as, for example, between buying jeans and sunglasses). Here the goods themselves provide only part of the reasons for a final choice, and trade is the most sensitive and quickest interpreter of such choices, due to its proximity to the final demand;
- *final selling price* is dynamic in time and space, and therefore varies significantly at different times and points of sale. This dynamism derives from constant intermediary processes between producer, distributor and final consumer. The consumer is no longer a passive element in the transaction chain. On the contrary, he or she is informed, often participates in communication processes and may choose the purchase time and place according to *non-loyalty* patterns of behaviour, thereby acting alongside trade in setting the final selling price;
- the critical factor in competition is the *direct variable cost of transaction*, traceable to a cost centre and set by a producer and intermediary organisation. Producer and trade thus contribute to determining the level of the transaction cost, which in situations of over-supply must overcome any consumption inertia for certain product types (product choice) and thereby motivate and support consumer brand choice.

Markets with over-supply therefore present strongly unstable demand (choices among different product classes and products with different uses; preference volatility; non-loyalty and disloyalty purchase behaviour) and supply structures (planned innovation acceleration; production delocalisation²⁵; creation of ‘demand bubbles’).

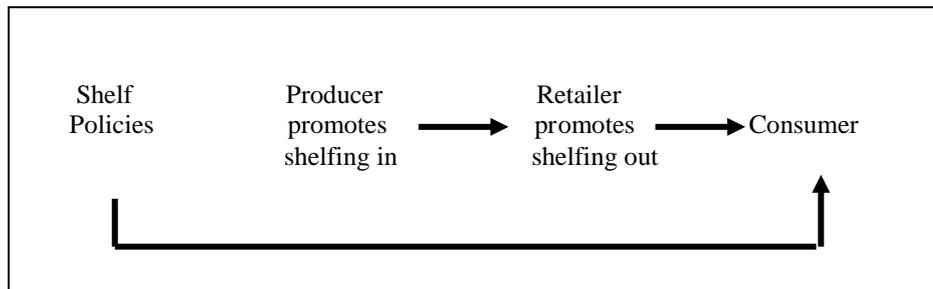
Over-supply emphasises the critical nature of shelf policy, which maximises opportunity-to-shelf both physically (on the shelves) and in virtual windows. Therefore, producers and trade generally agree on non-competitive means to set up temporary offers to satisfy specific demand bubbles, with the common goal of presenting a stimulating shelf display, although clearly with different shelf policies given their different roles (Figure 2).

Demand bubbles derive from an aggregation process (significantly different to a disaggregation process that results in segmentation in stable markets) that goes to create specific, highly unstable forms of demand. On the other hand, managing market instability presupposes the capacity for rapid development and exploitation

of the demand bubble. This in turn imposes a continuous action aimed at identifying offers that follow one another over time and which are able to interest and satisfy groups of final consumers.

Conditions of over-supply highlight consistency between contingent expectations of a group of consumers and the availability of goods at times and places with the highest likelihood of purchase. This consistency is pursued by producers and retailers with specific shelf policies intended to maximise the opportunity and profitability of the physical or virtual presence of certain products.

Figure 2: *Producer & Retailer Shelf Policies*



In general, manufacturer shelf policies give preference to product choices based on the speed with which they exit from the point of sale (focusing attention on product rotation instead of on margin of contribution, as happens for decisions about segmentation in stable markets). Producer shelf policies also involve covering retail points of sale on the basis of traffic flow and according to privileged business relationships (generally medium-long term) for the storage, development, and display of products²⁶.

As regards trade, the development of mass retail sales formats (shopping centres, hypermarkets, discount stores, etc.) reflects the shelf policies of distribution firms not only with continuously increased shelf profitability at points of sale²⁷, but especially with attention to all factors affecting turnover and profitability, and specific emphasis on advantages that can be achieved by global operations (multi-make purchase centres, network outsourcing, multi-make logistics, increase in size and specific services of network points of sale, as in the case of Metro-Saturn-Media World; 24/7 opening hours, etc.).

In markets characterised by over-supply and by global competitive forces, the shelf policies of producers and retailers – which constantly deal with consumption surplus and must act promptly to take full advantage of demand bubbles – emphasise the critical nature of corporate information flow integration processes (outside, inside, and to/from co-makers), and, specifically, the importance of computer-based information communication. Information flows allow dialogue with multiple parties (on products, prices, promotional campaigns, etc.) both simultaneously and in real time. Therefore, in line with trade's superiority in production-distribution-consumption relations, these flows extend the borders of competition and the availability of an IT system with extremely rapid action-reaction times.

Markets characterised by over-supply, therefore create competitive situations in which:

1. space becomes a key factor in competition (market-space competition); highly dynamic and unstable due to variability caused by continuous

innovation in the range of available products or services and by increasing selectivity of demand;

2. tangible aspects of supply and physical (administrative and geographical) limits do not determine market-space competition. On the contrary, competition is dominated by intangible aspects of supply and by virtual spatial coordinates²⁸ that integrate and define the physical dimension (market-space management²⁹).

In conditions of over-supply, market instability and dissimilarity in demand create a precise 'pecking order' between *marketing research* and *market research*. The dominance of *marketing research* is linked to the creation and management of demand bubbles, i.e. to highly-volatile and highly-characterised company processes geared towards enhancing consumer-product relations, and involve:

- acquisition, processing and in-house sharing of data and information;
- reduced time requirements to collect, process and employ information;
- selection of information useful in order to create a demand bubble;
- use of data collection methods and data evaluation systems based on physical or virtual aggregation processes³⁰.

As far as demand bubbles - and, more generally speaking, producer and retailer shelf policies - are concerned, *marketing research* (which obviously cannot be based on historical data extraction, as occurs in stable contexts) emphasises, on the one hand, associative techniques (such as data mining) applicable to enormous databases concerning recent customer buying behaviour, and, on the other, employs critical selection techniques to obtain a smaller amount of highly significant data that concentrates on the dynamics of certain phenomena.

□ *'Companies now use an interactive process with data mining techniques aimed at defining the target, attracting customers, and keeping them as partners in the purchase process. For example, collaborative filtering techniques provide customised recommendations to each customer by comparing his/her preferences with those of other customers with similar profiles.... Traditional data collection – mail intercepts, telephone interviews, self-managed postal surveys, and hybrid approaches such as telephone/mail/telephone – is integrated with surveys conducted via the Internet and with automatic data mining regarding Internet behaviour.... Marketing research benefits from technology by making tacit knowledge (purchase behaviour, interest and activity profiles, preferred payment methods) more accessible'*³¹.

Lastly, *market research* also offers distinctive aspects with regard to shelf policies influenced by strong competition. In global markets and markets marked by over-supply, *market research* underlines the importance of competitive intelligence (active and defensive³²) to, firstly, acquire knowledge about uncontrollable environmental trends and patterns and, secondly, for database management in order to acquire information signals on controllable environmental phenomena and events.

□ *‘Competitive intelligence involves the use of public sources to develop data on competition, competitors and the market environment. It then transforms, by analysis, that data into information. Public in competitive intelligence means all information you can legally and ethically identify, locate and then access’*³³.

Alternatively, database management specifically identifies the process of creating, updating, and using customer databases and other databases (products, suppliers, retailers) to contact customers, make transactions and develop new relationships³⁴.

In general, a business database contains ‘previous purchases by business customers, the volume, prices, and profits for such purchases; the name of team members who handle purchases (and their age, date of birth, hobbies, favourite foods, etc.); the status of current contracts, an estimate of one’s share in the customer’s purchases; competing suppliers; an assessment of one’s strengths and weaknesses (compared to competitors) in the sale of products and services to the customer, and the customer’s habits, models, and purchase policies’³⁵.

For example a customer database contains a great deal of information that companies accumulate via transactions and all other customer contact, data collected by registration and toll-free numbers, information contained in cookies, etc.

The competitive instability clearly seen in shelf policies creates an overall demand consisting of various dissimilar forms of demands. These are made up from a large number of units that might be either very similar to, or very different from, one another, and which - from time to time but not by chance or randomly – are aggregated in that they have a common underlying reason for purchasing a temporary offer proposed by a company. The socio-demographic characteristics of the various units are therefore not significant in defining overall demand, given that the aggregation factor consists of the company product or service supply system, which is made up of final consumer choices at given times and in given spaces.

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Notes

¹ Cf. Lambin Jean-Jacques, Brondoni Silvio M., Overture de 'Market-Driven Management', *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 1, 2000-2001.

² See Proctor Tony, *Essential of Marketing Research*, Pearson Education, Edinburgh, 3rd ed., 2003, p.1.

³ See Kotler Philip, *Marketing Management. Analysis, Planning, and Control*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 5th ed., 1984, p. 64.

⁴ Cf. Collese Umberto, *Marketing*, Cedam, Padua, 3rd ed., 2000, p. 333.

⁵ Cf. Barile Sergio, Metallo Gerardo, *Le ricerche di mercato. Aspetti metodologici e applicativi*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2nd ed., 2002, p.109 and following.

⁶ See Buell Victor P., *Marketing Management. A Strategic Planning Approach*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1985, pp. 39-42.

⁷ See Lambin Jean-Jacques, *Market-Driven Management*, MacMillan, London, 2000, p.15.

⁸ Cf. Livingstone James M., *A Management Guide to Market Research*, MacMillan, London, 1977; Mariampolski Hy, *Qualitative Market Research*, Sage Publications, London, 2001; de Leersnyder Jean-Marc, *Corporate Culture and Geopolitics*, *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 2, 2002.

⁹ See Churchill Gilbert A., *Marketing Research: Methodological Foundations*, The Dryden Press, New York, 7th ed., 1999, p.11.

¹⁰ See Kotler Philip, *Marketing Management. Analysis, Planning, and Control*, 5th ed., cit., p. 194. One of the first definitions of marketing research was: 'The systematic gathering, recording, and analyzing of data about problems relating to the marketing of goods and services'. See: Alexander Ralph S., *Marketing Definitions*, American Marketing Association, Chicago, 1963, p.16.

¹¹ See Lambin Jean-Jacques, *Market-Driven Management*, cit., p.138.

¹² Cf. Molteni Luca, Troilo Gabriele (ed.), *Ricerche di marketing*, McGraw-Hill, Milan, 2003.

¹³ Cf. Brondoni Silvio M., *Patrimonio di marca e politica di comunicazione*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2002.

¹⁴ Cf. Buell Victor P., *Marketing Management. A Strategic Planning Approach*, cit., pp. 125-127.

¹⁵ Cf. Brondoni Silvio M., *Global Markets and Market-Space Competition*, *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 1, 2002.

¹⁶ Cf. Corniani Margherita, *Demand Bubble Management*, *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 1, 2002.

¹⁷ Cf. Corniani Margherita, *La gestione competitiva delle bolle di domanda*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2000, p. 43 and following.

¹⁸ Cf. Brondoni Silvio M., *Brand Policy and Brand Equity*, *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 1, 2000-2001.

¹⁹ Cf. Brondoni Silvio M., *Marche 'commerciali', 'industriali' e pseudo marche nell'evoluzione dei rapporti industria-distribuzione*, *Sinergie*, June, 1990.

²⁰ Cf. Lambin Jean-Jacques (ed.), *La recherche Marketing*, Ediscience, Paris, 1994.

²¹ See Lambin Jean-Jacques, *Market-Driven Management*, cit., p. 532.

²² See Lambin Jean-Jacques, *Market-Driven Management*, cit., p. 533.

²³ Cf. Brondoni Silvio M., Global Markets and Market-Space Competition, *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), cit.

²⁴ Cf. Brondoni Silvio M., Comunicazione, performance e sistema delle risorse immateriali d'impresa, *Sinergie*, n. 59, 2002.

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²⁶ Cf. Reinartz Werner, Customising Prices in On-Line Markets, *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 1, 2002; Albanese Fabio, Merchandising and Licensing to Improve Brand Equity. The Coca-Cola Case, *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 1, 2000-2001.

²⁷ Cf. Martinelli Andrea Francesco, From Cornering to 'Virtual Cornering', *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 1, 2002.

²⁸ Cf. McDaniel Carl jr., Gates Roger, *Marketing Research: The Impact of the Internet*, John Wiley, New York, 5th ed., 2002.

²⁹ Cf. Brondoni Silvio M., Ouverture de 'Market-Space Management', *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 1, 2002.

³⁰ Cf. Gnecchi Flavio, Comunità virtuali, comunità locali e comunicazione pubblica, *Sinergie*, settembre-dicembre, 2002.

³¹ Cf. Wind Jerry, Mahajan Vijay, Digital Marketing, *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management* (symphonya.unimib.it), n. 1, 2002.

³² Cf. McGonagle John J., Vella Carolyn M., *Bottom Line Competitive Intelligence*, Quorum Books, Westport, 2002; Walle Alf H., *Qualitative Research in Intelligence and Marketing*, Quorum Books, Westport, 2001.

³³ See McGonagle John J., Vella Carolyn M., *The Internet Age of Competitive Intelligence*, Quorum Books, Westport, 1999, p. 1.

³⁴ Cf. Aaker David A., Kumar V., Day George S., *Marketing Research*, John Wiley, New York, 7th ed., 2001, pp. 690-704.

³⁵ See Kotler Philip, *Marketing Management*, Prentice-Hall, Engl.