Towards a Knowledge Marketing and model of consumer's competencies through the creativity in application of the smell web

Oleg Curbatov
Associate Professor
University Sorbonne Paris Nord
Center of Research CEPN
99 Avenue Jean Baptiste Clément, 93430 Villetaneuse, France

e-mail : *oleg.curbatov@univ-paris13.fr*

Marie Louyot-Gallicher
Senior Researcher

e-mail: *mclogal@gmail.com*

Abstract
This communication reports on the progress of a "Knowledge Marketing" research based on a conceptual analysis of consumer's competencies, as defined in marketing research and aims at proposing a new model of competencies for a better understanding of the value created by the consumer and the firm. The conceptual framework is illustrated by the use of the Smell Web (Exhalia Project). This illustration is elaborated from a secondary exploitation of a qualitative research. This communication takes into account the polysemy of the notion of competency and tries to contribute to the enrichment of current theoretical and managerial works on value co-creation.

Key words
Competency, consumer, marketing, creativity, smell web
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Introduction

Research into experiential marketing suggests taking into account the experiential dimension which would broaden the view of the client relationship in the services field. The main objective is to see how these services are produced, marketed and consumed in a relational process made up of various creatives experiences. The work which explains the notion of customer competence and that of appropriation experiences, contribute to the widening of marketing studies.

The approach is built round moderate marketing, the principle of which is to link up the consumption experience concept with the consumers' desire for appropriation. It relies on the vision of the proactive consumer who seeks to be less passive and to bring his personal contribution to his consumption experiences. For the corporate entity, this means rethinking how it conducts its business and manages its clientele, meeting the emotional quest of the moment, offering recognition and rooting, favouring creativity, removing the producer / consumer barrier by involving the consumer in developing the offering. These trends encourage us to take a new look at the marketing contributions and to construct a new proposition based on the creation of client-corporate entity knowledge: "Knowledge Marketing". According to proposition, the customers are involved in this process of organisational learning. They are no longer outside the corporate entity, but are an integral part of the "organisation", and of the organisational knowledge creation process. It shows that 'Knowledge Marketing' consists in developing corporate collaborators' competence and that of customers involved in the organisational knowledge creation process.

As an extension of the work in Knowledge Marketing the consumer is a co-creator of value. Their opinions stand in contrast to views of conventional marketing, which targets and captures consumers. More exactly, the dominant service logic of service suggests that the value creation is the result of a combined effect of "operant resources", defined as a set of knowledge, skills, expertise, creativity activated both by the company and the consumer (Vargo and Lusch, 2008b). However, for Brown (2007), service dominant logic suffers from the absence of empirical evidence which would permit to enrich the knowledge on the way the consumers engage themselves in a co-creation process.

These new elements involve for companies the necessity to build frameworks to understand which knowledge, know-how or creatives abilities their consumers require and how these latter acquire. However, the concept of "operant resources" does not seem relevant enough to report completely the dynamics of realization of these tasks from the point of view of the consumer. Indeed, it consists of some number of heterogeneous elements (psychological state and skills, knowledge, know-how and expertise) among which the structure, the contents, the links which they maintain remain relatively vague. The notion of competency seems to be more relevant to re-articulate the diverse elements composing the concept of "operant resources ".

What does mean the fact that consumers bring into play competencies in general way and, more specifically, in the context of the consumer's co-creative skills. In this framework, how can one understand a consumer experience or the activity that consists in creating, choosing and consuming a product or service? This paper aims at clarifying the idea of consumer competencies and enhancing current theories on the topic.

1. *The consumer, a competent actor*

1.1 Consumer competencies: a poor conceptualisation in marketing research
Eight theoretical currents (lead users, meet of service, resistance of the consumer, experience of consumption, consumers' communities, consumer empowerment, consumer agency, working consumers) shaped the face of the consumer co-worker (Cova and Dalli, 2009). If these currents – and each of these currents - take a different epistemological otherwise ontological point of view and are distinguished themselves by the aspects of the consumer's activity (generation of ideas, coproduction of the service, immaterial work, production of narrative, etc.), they form, however, a rather complete and composite reading framework. Furthermore, beyond the heterogeneousness of these theories, the notion of competency seems to be the tacit common denominator.
The consumer empowerment movement (Denegri-Knott, Zwick and Schroeder, 2006) advocates rebalancing power in the relationship and urging consumers to take responsibility. In this scenario they have more control over their choices and the relationship by taking part in defining its terms. In the consumer agency current (Arnould and Thomson, 2005), consumers restructure the narrative of the theatre performance in which they participate. That performance requires them to create meaning for their consumption activity and for its movement in a given market world based on narrative resources they explain. The working consumer current (Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody, 2008) met underscores the deviant form of co-creation viewed as a two-pronged approach enticing consumers to implement their ability to re-appropriate the capital and means of production traditionally held by the company. The idea of the company and customers orchestrating competencies and resources lies at the core of those theories, but no sound conceptualisation of them exists yet (MacDonald and Uncles, 2007). After developing conceptual thoughts about competencies brought into play in consumption activities by consumers, we will describe which competencies are required when firms implement sensorial marketing tools.

1.2. *A proposed conceptual framework of consumption activities through the lens of competencies consumers bring into play*

A detour through the management sciences is necessary to grasp the ambivalence of organisational or individual **competencies**. Lado and Wilson (1994) argue that skill refers to the coordinated implementation of 'entrance competencies', in other words the result of a combination of tangible and intangible resources, including software, equipment and products, as well as the accumulation of past experiences memorised as explicit, formalised or tacit knowledge, practices (the ability to specifically act based on a predefined process or goals) and attitudes (the desire to make a commitment and cope with changes, innovative state of mind, etc.). Competencies are inseparable from action and independent of the context in which they operate. Depending on the task to be performed, the coordinated implementation of resources or 'entrance competencies' is based on transformation competencies (Lado and Wilson, 1994), in other words on particular organisational processes manifested in a certain number of skilled behaviours relating to a given action.

THE competencies' TRIPLE NATURE	DEFINITIONS
"Entrance **competencies** "	Tangible resources: software, equipment, products Intangible resources: accumulated knowledge, practices, attitudes
"Transformation **competencies** "	Organisational processes (ex. employee empowerment, synergy between departments)
Manifestations of skilled behaviours or "exit **competencies** "	Competencies implemented in a given activity (market monitoring, production, distribution, etc.)

Table 1: Nature of the competency (adapted from Lado and Wilson, 1994)

Competencies are shaped and expressed in social interactions and their perimeter depends on the road chosen (path dependency), which travels through the experimentation, learning and unlearning processes that build them. They are the result of a continuous flow of learning experiences that strengthen and broaden the base of the company's competencies, in other words, entrance competencies are the sum of tangible and intangible resources. The foundation of pre-existing competencies, which involves passive or active knowledge or attitudes, conditions the nature of the flow of skills generated in a given action.

More operational approaches to competencies parallel to the theoretical currents have been proposed. "Knowledge Marketing" consists in tapping and developing the knowledge of consumers and of company employees involved in the value creation process at the same time (Curbatov, 2003). In operational terms, "Knowledge Marketing" helps to give consumers competencies and to develop the competencies of the company's members. Its success depends on the development of a customer typology based on two factors: the customer's level of competencies and his or her degree of involvement in his or her experience, which has an impact on the company entities involved in their experiences.

1.2.1. A dynamic view of competencies or the "process-competencies"
In the framework of consumption, we propose viewing process-competencies as a set of known facts, know-how, practices and behaviours mobilized in a given situation that involves two sets of equipment (Le Boterf, 1994) consumers draw upon in order to collaborate. First comes the equipment incorporated in their person, defined in marketing mainly as their *cultural, physiological or individual resources (*Arnould, Price and Malshe, 2006; Baron and Harris, 2008), but also *social resources* defined as family relationships, consumer communities, commercial relationships (Mac Donald and Uncles, 2007).

Creativity is defined as 'a psychological' or 'socio-psychological' process by which an individual or a group of individuals shows imagination in how to associate ideas, situations and, by achieving the efficient result of this process changes, modifies or transforms the perception, use or materiality with a given audience. Regarding this creativity, individual psychological resources can be used by the consumer. Nevertheless, in our opinion, it is a rather restrictive vision, without being able to consider the use of other resources in a creative emergence.

Works in the education sciences focusing in particular on technology training enable us to add *notional* and *communicational* resources to this classification. It underscores the idea of "notions" - knowledge - helping to open up questioning, to orientate observation or understanding, to direct analysis, to organize space and time or to guide creative action choices.

The communicational resources incorporated into consumer competencies might include the ability to speak the same language as the supplier, seller or after-sales service department, make appropriate complaints, warn about dangerous products or consumer situations, give opinions, and vote or communicate on the product by relying on various media. Communicational resources can take the form of collaborative resources involving bilateral, interactive communication on, for example, the creation of personalised products. Finally, we can add, the *financial & material resources* (money and loans available for consumption).

Consumers also draw upon their environment, including family relationships, friendships and consumer communities (Arnould et al., 2006), in addition to the *commercial resources* (like communication channels, physical and technical materials, product and service offers), which they integrate into their own resources in order to co-create their experience.

RESOURCES	ELEMENTS
Physiological or individual	Physical and mental and **psychological** condition, energy, emotion, strength, time spent on consuming
Social	Family relationships, consumer communities, commercial relations
Notional	Essential knowledge about the product/service
Communicational	Empathy, sense of cooperation
Commercial	Communication channels, physical and technical materials and on/off line platforms, product and service offers
Cultural	Specific knowledge about a product, service or brand, the company's ethical, social, economic, legal and commercial issues
Financial	Money and loans available for consumption

Table 2. Classification of resources consumers mobilise

1.2.2. A static vision or the "competencies"
Competency lies in consumers' ability to tap different resources, taking the form of various competent behaviours relating in particular to the consumption situation they are faced with, whether they are interacting with the company or not.

Those competent behaviours or "competencies" include:
- *cognitive competencies* involving, in marketing, the ability to decode companies' messages and advertisements (Macdonald and Uncles, 2007) as well as the cognitive efforts made in the act of purchasing (search for information, creation of meaning, knowledge of rights and responsibilities). This type of competency can be found in the education sciences under the term *cognitive* or *informational competencies*, which are defined as the ability to identify the possible nature, scope and sources of information required; find the information effectively and efficiently; read, understand and memorize it; assess its usefulness, relevance and quality; effectively and efficiently organise it; and monitor it. The customer's *cognitive competencies* are the ability to read, interpret, memorise and organise product information.

- *Competencies* that could be termed *instrumental.* It involves the consumer's ability to handle "physical" products before, during and after consumption; tools belonging to consumers (computers, peripherals, platforms) available in their environment online computer tools; company-provided social media such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter; interactive terminals; websites; tools letting people create their own personal products; and representation tools (labels, invoices, estimates, schedules of specifications, instructions, electronic meters, etc.). This definition is proposed by some marketing researchers who prefer taking a broader approach. To them, consumers' instrumental competencies echo the coordinated, masterful use of a technique, technology or know-how to perform another task, such as verbalising expectations understandable by the company (Lüthje, 2004). Bringing instrumental skills into play might also involve relying on a certain number of social resources, such as friendships, professional relationships or online networks (Macdonald and Uncles, 2007) in order to reach a given goal: the use of the terms *relational competencies* seems appropriate here.

- *Competencies more directly connected to the use* of a product, service or media (Internet), which helps to open up access to a legitimate message about the product,

service or media in question or even to propose other uses and functions. Von Hippel (1978, 1986, 1999, 2005) Béji-Bécheur and Gollety, 2007) and, more recently in particular, have done marketing research on those competencies. They are similar to the idea of *metacognitive competencies* (Mottet, 2006), which involves implementing creative abilities: creating new representations, fresh knowledge and heuristic solutions to practical issues dealing with consumption and shifting meanings or creating new ones.

We have sought to classify customers' competencies for a better understanding of consumer activities generated by purchasing, subscribing, using and experiencing a product or service, but they are not implemented in isolation from one another. They are interdependent. For example, *instrumental competencies or skills* depend on prior knowledge of the technical tools' functions (notional resources) and the ability to mobilise them (in other words accumulated *cognitive competencies*) depending on the market situations consumers live.

COMPETENCIES CATEGORIES	Types of competencies
INSTRUMENTAL COMPETENCIES	• Ability to handle and use objects and instruments that make it easier or possible to benefit from consumption • Ability of consumers to use a network of personal contacts before entering the market • Ability to use online networks • Ability of consumers to use their knowledge about the materials and technology used to make products existing on the market in order to be able to translate their needs and expectations into a technical language engineers can appropriate. • Ability to use the rights and responsibilities relating to their customer status in order to put pressure on the company • Ability to use and make the most of multimedia technology • Ability to orchestrate the various channels the company has set up depending on the request
COGNITIVE COMPETENCIES	• Ability to decode or criticise advertising messages and to master marketing codes • Cognitive effort to understand marketing contradictions and the company's delegation of "operational contradictions" • Ability to look for information before buying a product, to compare prices, warranties and the quality of offers • Ability to remember relevant information • Ability to memorise product information • Ability to handle production rules (procedural knowledge) making it possible to use the information received outside or stored in memory as best as possible (declarative knowledge) • Ability to calculate a budget
USAGE AND CREATIVE COMPETENCIES	• Ability to wisely use products and services • Ability to use products for an unintended purpose • Ability to discover new functions and new ways of using products • Ability to discover and understand new representations • Ability to understand and/or modify one's own behaviour

Table 3. Types of consumer competencies

1.2.3. A conceptual framework

The resources mobilized must be identified in order to distinguish those competencies. They consist of knowledge, know-how, practices and behaviour patterns used in a given situation, whereas competencies lie in individuals' ability to tap various resources in each of those areas. With regard to the dynamic and static visions of the competence and as we try to describe it in figure 1, consumption-related activities can be understood as bringing into play

a certain number of instrumental, relational, cognitive, use, creative or metacognitive 'competencies' stemming from the consumer's own notional, cultural, communicational, collaborative and physiological resources available in his or her environment whether it is commercial (communication channels, technical tools for interacting with the company) or not (social resources, including online) and from which individuals draw in order to consume.
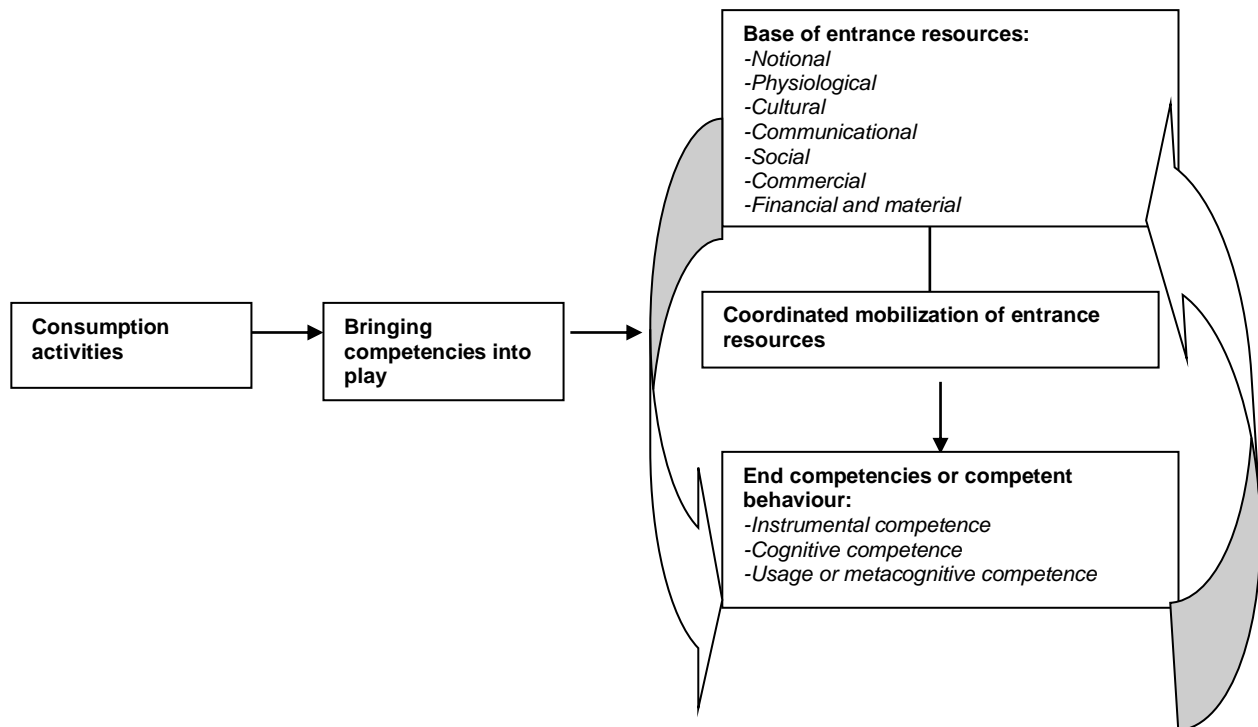

Figure 1. The model of consumption activities through the lens of bringing competencies

2. One illustration of our conceptual framework

We present in this paper the illustration associated with the resources integrated and the competencies activated by the customer in the framework of the Exhalia project implementation.

2.1. Research method

We choose to elaborate the illustration in order to show the multiple integrated resources mobilized by the consumer and competent behaviours he could activate in some situations of consumption and in particularly to create value-in use around sensorial marketing tools.

The illustration was built from the project "Exhalia" launched by France Telecom Research and Development in 2003 in which we participated, which is re-analysed through our conceptual framework of the consumer competence. Thus, we proceeded to a secondary analysis of qualitative materials (Dargentas et al. 2009). Indeed, this type of analysis presents some interest to improve the qualitative research by allowing the accumulation of knowledge thanks to a new questioning of the set of data.

The Exhalia "Smell Web" project was elaborated with the researcher as both the designer of this project and producer of marketing knowledge. In this way, the researcher contributes to the emergence of new scientific representations and knowledge which are procedural and non-substantive, and which aim to provide a guide to "organisational engineers" and which can subsequently be used by other companies to solve complex problems. Thus, our experience in designing marketing and R&D projects, allows us to propose methodological reference in the framework of projects co-built with a firm. More precisely, two types of study were conducted:

- qualitative tests for the of uses and perceptions, people's behaviour towards this innovation at the France Télécom R&D department;
- an empirical study, conducted in Paris Sorbonne Nord University to validate the conceptual aspects of "*Knowledge Marketing*".

This research was carried out thanks to the scientific partnership between the City of Grasse and that R&D department, based on research work.

2.2. Experience of the « Exhalia Smell Web »

The *Exhalia* concept aims:
- to diffuse fragrances in synch with data, images and/or sound, transmitted by a telecommunications network;
- to perfume the content of television, web, DVD in real time, but more generally, all telecommunication and multimedia forms.

The digital portal, created and managed by France Telecom R&D in 2003 and transferred to Exhalia Corporate in 2004, federates olfactory sites and multimedia forms. Several professionals from different worlds, such as city of Grasse wish to try it out on their respective sites by including a 'scented' dimension. In order to promote the image of the world capital of perfume and its touristic "services", the city of Grasse perfumed six web pages of www.ville-grasse.fr with the specific city fragrances (rose, jasmine, lavender, thyme-rosemary, etc.) associated to places of interest (fields of roses and lavenders, culinary recipes) or to the main events (the Jasminade Party or the 'Exporose' trade shows). Instrumental competencies are required on behalf of the consumer to use relevantly the equipment which diffuses fragrances and to be able to navigate through scented websites. The use of the site also implies the involvement of cognitive competencies (to read, to memorize information, to recognize perfumes, to create a knowledge on "usages" of the city) which beforehand require the mobilization of notional and social resources (main notions about perfumes, knowledge about the main tourist places and about the actors of the tourism in Grasse) and commercial ones (images, texts presented on the perfumed web site). The creation, the "composition" of personal touristic road trip from the city of Grasse's smell website means finally the activation of metacognitive or use competencies (see table 1)

	Integrated resources	Competencies brought into play
	Notional resources: notions about perfumes and about specific associated touristic web sites (about areas, food, festivities…)	*Instrumental competencies* Capacity to navigate through the website of the city (6 smell websites) using the required equipment.
	Social resources: knowledge about the main tourist places and about the main actors of the tourism in Grasse.	*Relational competencies* Capacity to contact tourism offices or the website administrator.
	Cultural resources: specific knowledge about the city of Grasse's perfumes.	*Cognitive competencies* • *Informational competencies:* Capacity to process information provided by the website simultaneously with fragrances diffusion
	Physiological, sensorial resources: physical conditions linked with fragrances perception and sensorial emotions.	• *Use competencies or skills:* Capacity to download from the city website and from perfumed pages documents and to use them
	Commercial resources (channels of communication): website and tourism offices, events created by the city.	Capacity to create its own road trip in Grasse • *Metacognitive competencies*: Capacity to make the link between fragrances and websites to be able to create its own road trip
	Financial and material resources: equipment to diffuse perfumes, driver, computer, Internet connexion	

Table 4 Examples of resources and competencies brought into play by the smell web

3. Theoretical and managerial implication
The implications for skills and resources prompt companies to read the consumer's collaboration on three levels.

- ### Being attentive to the consumer's integration of resources
The first reading involves identifying the skills consumers activate by integrating the resources the company offers in their consumption experience.
To be attentive the company can revise its explicit or implicit analysis based on customer profiles and not just on organisation diagrams: the customer possesses cognitive, instrumental, metacognitive or usage skills in many areas that the organisation does not necessarily take into account.

- ### Being attentive to the skills required
If the company modifies its sometimes-partial consumer representations, the idea of skills and resources can lead marketers to ask themselves questions about the skilled behaviour required (ex.: **creativity**) in their activity's framework, consequently excluding customers who do not possess them.

- ### Conditions for activating the customer's skills
This analysis examines the mainsprings activating the consumer's skills. The illustrations are based on the premise that the customer skills benchmark the company defines matches the actual skills customers activate, but a basic question remains that must be the focus of future research.

That approach requires gathering accounts about their interactions with the brand in order to clearly identify the type of incorporated resources. More specifically, on a methodological level, several kinds of data must be collected in order to analyse the skills consumers implement and to identify those that can benefit the company, those the consumer does not possess due to a lack of resources or those that are in a latent state, including general information about the company, consumers and the relationships between them; information on the internal and external resources tapped in all the relational episodes; and the meaning consumers give the mobilisation of those resources.

Conclusion:
Following Vargo and Lush SDL, we argue that value resides in consumer actions, interactions, projects (Schau et al., 2009) that acquired resources and brought into play competencies make possible or support. However, these resources and competencies have not been clearly linked and overall classified to highlight the different forms of value created. This conceptual framework shows that competency is a dynamic process rather than a static state. It stems from the mobilization of consumers' own various resources (notional, physiological, sensorial, individual or social, communicational, cultural, and financial) and of those the company provides and their mobilization results in three main types of competencies: instrumental, cognitive, and use or metacognitive.

The specific case of using the smell web shows that consumers have to mobilize more than in other consumption situations, intangible resources (physiological and sensorial ones) in order to be able to use it advisedly. It highlights the importance for marketers to involve consumers very early in the process of smell web conception and to develop new methodologies to benefit from this customer knowledge. Thus, in our opinion, this conception of competency enable to understand more what the consumer "makes" in the activities bound to the consumption of a product or a service. This conceptual and operational framework of analysis could help organizations to combine better consumers' resources with their own resources to design to creative applications like smell web or more generally, products, services, on-line platforms technologies.

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