

## Customer knowledge competence, consumer insight interpretive techniques and competitive advantage of the firm.

When the emotional involvement of the consumer, in the process of purchase and consumption of the products, is very strong, and the product technology is quite homogenous among competing brands, the competence to integrate consumer knowledge within the firm and generate the consumer insights for marketing innovation becomes primary source of competitive advantage.

*Keywords: Consumer insight, Customer knowledge, Value co-generation, Product innovation process, Qualitative marketing research, Consumer behaviour, Consumer interpretive techniques.*

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## 1. Introduction and objectives

The following paper arises from an ongoing research's project focused on the interpretive consumer researches. The research's aims are: 1. identifying, under a theoretical perspective, the new interpretive techniques of consumer insight exploration and emersion; 2. exploring, under an empirical perspective, how the consumers are able to acquire and exchange knowledge, experience and skills, and, on the other side, individually or collectively, innovating in order to satisfy current and new needs. This part of empirical research will be focused on specific categories of product and services, and will take place using a set of complementary qualitative techniques; 3. applying case study methodology (Yin, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2006), in order to explore how leading firms, in the specific categories of products and services surveyed: a. perceive the role of consumer insight for the competitive advantage; b. understand the main techniques they use to explore it; c. translate the consumer insight in the marketing innovation process.

## 2. Theoretical background (and literature review)

### 2.1. The market knowledge and the customer knowledge competencies

The importance for the firms of harnessing knowledge-based competence, which yields a competitive advantage, is well established in both the marketing (Day, 1994; Glazer, 1991) and strategy (Pralahad, Hamel, 1990) literature. Market knowledge and customer knowledge competence are two related concepts, yet separate (Campbell 2003, Li & Calantone, 1998). Market knowledge competence refers to the processes that generate and integrate structured and organized market information in aggregate, which includes both customer and competitive information; customer knowledge competence, instead, refers to the processes that generate and integrate, inside the organization, market knowledge or information about specific customers. Campbell (2003) underlines the inimitability of customer knowledge competence in the market: "unlike customer knowledge, a customer knowledge competence is inimitable, because the processes of generating and integrating customer knowledge are embedded in organizational cognitive activities and are not observed readily from outside (Day, 1994; Prahalad, Hamel, 1990), and immobile, because these processes are created within the firm and cannot be purchased on the market (Day, 1994)". In accordance with Covà (2003), the consumers have to "take the control" of the marketing variables traditionally predefined by the firms (distribution, product, service distribution, brand communication), using the consumers and/or helping them to develop their competencies, not learning on them but from them and their experiences.

### 2.2. A deep and true understanding of the consumer: the customer insight

Jeppesen (2001) argues, that consumers - over all times - are capable to acquire knowledge, experience and skills and individually innovating, in order to satisfy current wants and to materialize imagined possibilities. To involve the customer, in order to cooperate more efficiently and effectively in the knowledge co-creation process, will be one of the greater challenges for the management (Gibbert *et al.*, 2002; Davenport *et al.*, 2001; Lundvall, 1985; von Hippel, 1988). But, which could be a definition of customer insight? Sawhney (2004) defines it as: "act of intuitively seeing the inner nature of things", and, more precisely, as "a fresh and not-yet-obvious understanding of customers that can become the basis for competitive advantage" of the firm. About customer insight, Zaltman (2003) says: "a lot goes on in our minds that we're not aware of. Most of what influences what we say and do occurs below the level of awareness. That's why we need new techniques: to get at hidden knowledge -insight to get what people don't know they know". The customer insight definition puts in evidence some distinctive characteristics (Sawhney 2004): a. it is a not-yet-obvious discovery; b. it is a unique and fresh perspective; c. it rarely emerges from quantitative research; d. it is often rooted in an observed anomaly.

### 2.3. The methodology and the techniques of exploration of the consumer insight

The generation of the firm theories is more often the result of the qualitative and conceptual researches, while the test of the theory more often is associated with the empirical validation of the hypotheses (Gummesson, 2005). Spanjaard and Freeman (2006) have put in evidence as the debate on the dominant paradigm (Kuhn, 1962) has had different evolutions over the time. Under the positivism perspective "quantitative methods take marketing from an art to a science, from conjecture to rigor" (Saunders, 1999). Like proposed by Hunt (1991), however, it is necessary to break down the wall of the dogmatism between positivism and interpretivism in the consumer researches, because aren't so far as they seem and, in any case, he advocates a "critical pluralism". In this paper we accept the research philosophy pointed out by Hunt (1991), and earlier by Siegel (1988) and Laudan (1977), who advocates "virtually every major period in the history of science is characterized both by the co-existence of numerous competing paradigms, with none exerting hegemony over the field, and by the persistent and continuous manner in which the foundational assumptions of every paradigm are debated within the scientific community". Thanks to this opposite point of view, in the time has been asserted the conviction that greater they are the benefits when the two methodologies

are implemented together, with none prevailing on the other (Sawhney 2004, Gummesson, 2005). The quantitative researches would be positivist and deductive, finalized to confirm an insight through the test of the hypotheses and to validate or to reject a theory proposal or to acquire answers to a very defined research questions. They would be, moreover, methodologically rigorous and would tend to consider the truth like objective and universal. The qualitative market researches, instead, would be of interpretative and reactive nature; using an inductive understanding of the phenomena, they would be finalized to generate insights. Such researches are of qualitative and eclectic type, they consider the truth like subjective and social constructed. This "pluralism" suggests a balanced undertaking rather than a competitive one (Brannen 2003; Deshpande, 1983; Stafford and Stafford, 1993), improving the practice in the consumer researches. However, more often than not, the role of qualitative research, within a market research context, is limited to capturing, as an exploratory and inductive methodology, the key variables which are important for further scientific, quantitative and deductive scientific methods (Milliken, 2001), thus, underrating its potential (Hyde, 2000). In our opinion, the qualitative researches, mainly when of "projective" type and aimed to explore deep and hidden knowledge in the consumers, have an independent dignity and not always they can be integrated with quantitative researches of extensive type. In fact, they may be carried out two orders of considerations: 1. don't lack, in managerial practice, and in the scientific research field (Spanjaard and Freeman, 2006), examples of adoption of qualitative methodologies with purpose of deductive type, that is confirmative of insight arisen in a precedent stage of the research, and pervasive of stages much more advanced in the cycle of new products and services development (confirmation of new product innovation, confirmation of a chosen about the variables of marketing mix); 2. when the insight exploration does regard high emotional involvement products and rooted and hidden aspects in the unconscious of the consumer, explored with methodology of "projective" inductive type, testing the arisen insight through quantitative marketing researches could not confirm the indications emerged in qualitative phase, not cause of the inexistence of the same, but of the unsuitability of the same quantitative methodologies to verify the validity and reliability of the same (Boddy 2005a, 2005b). In our opinion, the choice of the research methodology to adopt must be evaluated in relation: 1. to the level of existing knowledge on the object of study (if limited/or wide); 2. to the nature of the knowledge inquired (if superficial-aware or deep-hidden type); 3. in the perspective of the management, to the degree of innovation researched from the firm on the surveying object (incremental or radical). Generally, it can be said that the more the field of surveying is known, the knowledge inquired is of superficial or aware type, and the degree of innovation searched

by the firm is of incremental type (search of a fine tuning in the offer system or the variables of marketing mix), much more is useful, under these premises, apply a quantitative methodology to study (measure or explore) the phenomenon. When the surveying field is little known, the inquired knowledge is of deep or hidden type and the search for innovation (of product-service or of the business model) is of radical type, greater is the usefulness of qualitative market research and projective techniques. Moreover, in this last case, the insight deriving from the implementation of the qualitative techniques with exploratory purpose it is of strategic nature. In such cases it does not have sense to proceed to the confirmation of the same insight for quantitative way, as the questions through questionnaire with adoption of metric scale, cannot unhinge the psychological resistance of the consumer on aspects of which the same consumer often - like moreover indicated, from Zaltman (2008) - it does not have awareness.

### 3. Research methodology

This paper presents the first findings of an ongoing research project on the consumer insight whose empirical surveying, according to the original design of research, involves twelve product/service categories and case studies of leading firms. For exploring the customer insights about the product-service categories surveyed, we have made use of three different and complementary qualitative market research techniques: focus groups (Morgan 1997 and Boddy 2005b); personal experience narrative by the telling story technique (Gabriel and Griffiths 2004, Chase, 2005, Pinnegar and Daynes 2007, Riessman 2008); sentence completion (Soley and Smith, 2008). The interviews were carried out in June and July 2009, at the Marketing Laboratory, Department of Management, Faculty of Economics, University of Naples Federico II. Using a pilot study approach, in this paper, we present the results of the empirical surveys relative just to four category field, on twelve surveyed: consumer goods-alimentary paste, electronics consumer goods-mobile phones, consumer goods-detersives, consumer goods-femme care. Therefore, the elaborations contained in this paper are relative to the outcomes of eight focus group (two focus for each product category analysed; a total of 64 consumers interviewed, 8 for each group involved), among the 24 totally realized on twelve categories, whose duration has been, approximately, of 60 minutes each. Have also been carried out six "personal experience narrative" interviews (telling story of the duration approximately of 30 minutes each) for every product category (a total of 24 consumers interviewed) and 112 written affirmations through the "sentence completion" for each products category (8 affirmations gathered from each of 14 respondents involved in the individual and focus group interviews). The findings of the interviews based on the personal experience narrative (telling story)

have informed, in accordance with the principles of the grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990), the cognitive structure of the focus group. Respondents at the first phase of the research (six individual interviews) are different from those who took part to the focus groups (composed by 8 participants). The respondents have been responsible of purchase, female (for consumer goods pasta, deterative and femme care), with age greater of 35 years and, nearly all, in working conditions. For the product category mobile phone the respondents have been men and women with age greater of 24. To each respondent has been asked to tell, relatively to the product category inquired, its own personal history (and familiar for mobile phone, deterative and alimentary pasta) with reference to the principles that inspire: 1. the need (the alimentary style, the inter-personal communication, the home, the psychological well being) ; 2. the product purchase and/or consumption (or product use for category femme care); 3. the relationships with the distributive channels of such categories of product. During the eight focus groups (two for each product category) the chosen of the questions has been administrated considering the evidences arisen in the first stage of surveying and deepening the conceptual categories emerged during the personal experience narrative interviews. We present, also, in brief, the case studies of the following leading firms as: Barilla Spa, Fater Spa, Henkel Italia Spa, Nokia Italia Spa.

The aim of this paper is to recognize the existence of insights concerning the products' categories surveyed, using a complementary and integrated system of interpretive consumer research techniques. In other words, to verify the ability of such techniques to generate the insights not the reliability of these latter. These insights, indeed, could be tested, in a future phase of this ongoing research, using quantitative research methods.

### **4.1. The results of empirical survey on alimentary pasta on consumers**

With reference to the alimentary style of the interviewed ones, the analysis makes to emerge a young woman not good consumers of pasta like the man; also, because she gives excessive attention to the physical form, erroneously she attributes to the pasta a negative association regarding the diet. It is delineated, moreover, a search for greater pasta quality in particular for the familiar or convivial events that seem to assign to the pasta still a main role. Among other things the interviewed ones have nearly always marked the consideration of the smaller economic incidence of the pasta purchase cost on the total cost of the lunch also during the weekly days. Also, for those of greater quality, like the Gagnano ones, thirty/forty cents for person in a family of four components are not exceeded. It grows, in particular, the segment of quality pasta, and, from this point of view, Barilla is not

considered such, being perceived under the quality of others brand of Italian industrial pasta (i.e. De Cecco, Pasta Garofalo). The interviewed ones have evidenced a different approach to the preparation of the pasta in the weekly days, and the festive ones; during the festivity and for the events, the search of elaborated dishes is more recurrent, like the pasta's consumes of greater quality ("the Gagnano ones"). A third insight is inherent to a variable of the marketing mix, the packaging, that has a fundamental role for the customers. The packaging of Barilla, for example, does not like to the interviewed because the cardboard occupy an excessive space in the pantry, the smell of the cardboard is unpleasant, and it determines a bad conservation of the product (sometimes presence of micro organisms). If the confection breaths outside, it can be a limit when the conservation takes place in not optimal environment or atmosphere. In any case, the cardboard is of obstacle to the perception of the colour of the pasta and its "wrinkledness", two features of the pasta's quality. Some brands, in fact, use transparent or "naked" packaging, just to emphasize these characteristics of the pasta. The cardboard pack, likely, answers to requirements of optimal conservation of the pasta (the cardboard more than the plastic envelope breathes outside) and of positioning in the linear facing of shelf causes a different impact in terms of space and visibility of the confection. The last insight is not negligible for the aims of the advertising communication. The pasta, but more in general terms the cooking, assumes peculiar cultural traits in Southern Italy, ranging from the comparison with the values and the familiar equilibrium of the family of origin, to the enthusiasm of the cooks, not even housewives, who can achieve results of value in everyday cooking and freed themselves from the reference models.

### **4.2. The results of empirical survey on consumer electronic goods - mobile phone**

The empirical survey on the mobile phone purchasers has made to emerge some insights deserving of an eventual deepening: 1. the concept of the mobile phone as a gift is very strong in the perception of the interviewed. In fact, in particular for the adolescents, the first mobile phone represents always a gift; 2. the tendency not to switch off the mobile phone during the night, that often determines an its use like an instrument of lighting (a torch) for the nocturnal movements in house or in dark atmospheres; 3. the purchase of the mobile phone on Internet becomes more and more important above all in some segments of demand (the juvenile ones). Also, the social media marketing tools (forum, social network, blog, etc.) are useful in order to acquire technical information, opinions, references on products. It could be evaluated the opportunity to design branded instruments of social media marketing in order to avoid that the "voice" of the

consumers on Internet is left to the total initiative of the individuals; 4. the product is perceived like a “growing symbol” and that it contributes “to the construction of the own identity”. This insight could be interesting for a mobile phone communication strategy, in particular for the young consumers; 5. equally interesting, always to the aims of the communication strategy, is the metaphor emerged of mobile phone as “pendant to the neck”, by virtue of recalling the concept of precious accessory, but also of inseparability regarding the woman and fashion symbol.

### **4.3. The results of empirical survey on consumer goods-deterives**

The empirical survey on deterives has concurred to put in evidence some insights: 1. a strong attention to the environmental impact of the deterives that would push the users to apply them in thrifty way; 2. an important role, in many familiar groups, of the assistant to the domestic matters. This last one, being of fact the user of the products and also an expert, influences the choices and the perception of the products and, therefore, the adoption model in the middle and long period; 3. increasing attention to natural remedies as thought always effective: the alcohol, the vinegar, the ash, the ammoniac, etc. This is a field in which already there are the attempts of the leader brands, but still a lot is to be done; 4. the consumption of the unbranded products seems to assume an importance role in the future. Perhaps, the deterives sold by weight could be explored by leader brands, primarily within the Large Organized Retailers (LRO); 5. the growing specialization of the deterives seems to make to emerge a latent need of simplification in the use and therefore could be explored the role of an eventual deterive specialized for category of need or “universal”.

### **4.4. The results of empirical survey on consumer goods-Femme Care**

In reference to the need to feel herself comfort during the menstrual cycle, the analysis makes to emerge a woman much careful to the protection concept of herself and to the health of the products that she acquires. Such emotional involvement is growing among the young women who show more and more sophisticated requirements and needs from this point of view. To the absorbent products it is demanded that they are antiallergenic, therefore clinical tested, transpiring, not annoying, hygienic and above all do not have to be produced with chemical agents and man-made fibers. As the interviews put in evidence, does exist only an element of dissatisfaction for the consumers, referred to the materials by which the sanitary napkin is produced. The customers, in fact, complain a lot for the materials because far from

those natural (like the cotton) or the presence of chemicals fibers that, sometimes, provoke disturbances which irritations and reddening. The features related to the aesthetic and the functional properties, instead, satisfy totally the interviewed (particularly in regard to the brand mainly used LINES, in the version “Seta Ultra con Ali”) for which the attention has to be moved toward those elements of protection of their body that is related to the sphere of personal comfort. Ultimately, the latent need is to have a new product that maintains all the existing functions but using material that are more natural and more neighbors to the intimate sphere of the woman. Regarding, instead, the purchase and use of the products of inner absorbance, it has been emphasized a variable that generate numerous negative perceptions. The purchase of the product, in fact, is conditioned from ties of psycho-cultural nature, regarding: a. to the mentality of individuals; b. the fears connected to problematic use of the product, many times driven by psychological and cultural resistances. Therefore, the core benefit of inner absorbance products (“to feel herself free”) is not sufficient to generate an overcoming of the psychological and cultural barriers. A possible explanation of this phenomenon can be searched in the role of the mother of the young women consumers. For the purchase of this product, the mother does not come consulted, she isn't more the reference for cultural and psychological related issues. Disappearing this important “mentor”, the consumers, since they are young, don't take at all in consideration the hypothesis of using the product. The mother accompanies the young woman in the first phase of the event (first menstrual cycle) and, in the majority of the cases, she has an hostility toward the inner absorbents. For many young female consumers, this aspect affects negatively, to a level conscious and unconscious, the relationship with the product. Therefore, even if there isn't acrimony towards the product, its use comes limited to specific situations.

### **5. The empirical survey on firm: the findings regarding the case studies**

The empirical survey on the firms has been carried out applying case study methodology (Yin 2002; Flyvbjerg , 2006), in order to explore how four leading firms, in the specific categories of products and services surveyed (consumer goods pasta, deterives, femme care and electronic consumer goods–mobile phone): a. perceive the role of consumer insight; b. understand the main techniques they use to explore it; c. translate the customer insights in the innovation process, in terms of new products development. In order to develop the case studies, during the period July- September 2009, we have personally interviewed: Irene Larcher, Media and Marketing Services Director of Henkel Italy Spa; Elisabetta Ascione, Consumer Insight Manager of Nokia

Italy SpA; Paolo Melegari, Market And People Insight Manager of Barilla Spa; Rita Cantarini, Customer Marketing Knowledge Manager of Fater Spa. In the following we give just a synthetic summary of the main evidences arisen through the interviews.

First of all, it emerges a common trait for all case studies: there is a strong tendency to increase the resources and the use of qualitative market research in respect to quantitative ones for the marketing innovation.

**Fater Spa** is leader in the Italian market of the absorbency products for the person (Lines, Tampax, Linidor, Dignity are some leading brands). The marketing qualitative research techniques mainly adopted are the following ones: traditional techniques (focus group and personal experience interviews), to inform the segmentation analysis (the quantitative one); brainstorming on young employee women not operating in the Marketing Department, to stimulate new ideas and perceptions to deepening in quantitative survey; on teenagers, the employment of young women researchers (traditional techniques at individual, group level and also on web by chat); ethnography on the shoppers (shopping visit), to explore purchase dynamics and to evaluate the effects of the promotional strategies and/or co-marketing with the Large Organization Retailers labels; ethnography on the consumers (meeting with consumers), to test the launch of a new product of towels soaked in water for the child hygiene; diaristic (28 days research), to survey consumers perceptions during menstrual cycle and to define a new claim for the sanitary napkins for the night; personal interviews and focus groups, to select the claims for launching new lines of products for the absorbency.

**Henkel Italia Spa** is a subsidiary of Henkel AG & Co. KgaA, that holds globally leading market positions in the business areas: Laundry & Home Care, Cosmetics/Toiletries and Adhesive Technologies. The marketing qualitative research techniques mainly adopted are the following ones: traditional techniques (focus group and personal experience interviews); concept clinic that tests the "product concepts" during the focus groups modifying in real time, with the collaboration of a designer, the color of the product, the label, the format and recording the reactions of the consumers to the changes; during the interviews and focus groups is used the technique of the metaphors (chosen of the images, associations, collage and interpretation of the image composed through the collage); ethnography on the consumers (home visit), to understand the existing gap between what they declare and what they really make at home day by day; ethnography on the shoppers (shopping visit), to find out, through the observation of the consumer in the point of sale, not satisfied needs.; "skill lab" or competitive focus group: "we put strong Dash users and strong Dixan users in competition each other in order to speed up the contradictions", as answered us the manager interviewed. An advanced program on neural-

marketing also exists, at international level. It was emerging, from focus groups, the sensibility of the consumers to the natural ingredients or the grandmother remedies (i.e. like vinegar). Nelsen "Carboni Attivi" and "Dixan Lavanda" are examples of product innovations that have given shining results in such a direction.

**Barilla Spa** is a leader in the pasta business worldwide, for the pasta ready sauces business in continental Europe, for the bakery products business in Italy, and for the crisp bread business in Scandinavia. Marketing research approach of Barilla Spa is strategic. The insight management office of Barilla (called Market & People Insight) has been created in 1997. The qualitative marketing researches in Barilla cover all the phases of new product development process, as following:

1. *Product Design Experience (PDE)*. It is a methodology of designing a new product by the perceptions and the tastes of the consumers, surveyed through focus groups and under supervision by management of the involved functions (Marketing, R&D, Market & People Insight). The "Armonie" and the "Campagnole" of Mulino Bianco, the "Emiliane" of Barilla, are some of the new products developed through the PDE technique;
2. *Ethnography (Real Life Experience)*. It is realized through a team composed by representatives coming from the Marketing, R&D, Sales, Production, also international. The ethnography regards categories of already existing products in the market. The more recurrent modalities are the following ones: a. safari with the consumer in places of interest; b. shopping accompanied with the consumer; c. home visit with observation participated in various moments of consumption (breakfast, lunch, dinner). Some of the product innovations emerged through the application of such technique are: "Le parole della pasta", "I valori (del Mulino Bianco) ieri e oggi", "Il Sugo Carbonara", the "In store bakery lay out" (that is, the analysis of the composition of the products' bakery assortment offered to the big retail chains);
3. *Creativity*. In this case, the key organizational functions committed on the customer (Marketing, R&D, Market and People Insight) work together to create and develop new concepts of product or new brands' positioning. We speak in this case of "Concept lab and/or Get in touch". One of the innovations of greater success developed by the application of such technique was the "Ready Meals" in France;
4. *Web*. It's totally a new emergent approach to listen the *vox populi*. "We send physically the products to the consumers; the interaction instead proceeds on line", as said the manager interviewed. One of the innovations of greater success developed by the application of such technique are INCONTRI and SAVOURY of Mulino Bianco.

**Nokia Italia Spa** is a subsidiary of Nokia Corporation, globally leading company in the mobile solutions market. The researches on consumer insight for the product innovation are exclusively of competence of the Market Research unit worldwide. The Market Research Depart-

ment of Nokia Italy, even in relation to the importance of the market, is frequently involved in the global researches, in particular in the focus groups. This involvement is at tactical level for the creativity: for example, to select between various layout of advertising communication for their understanding or approval, in order to proceed with the quantitative survey to evaluate them. The marketing qualitative research technique mainly adopted are the following ones: traditional techniques (focus group and personal experience interviews); then, generally, it follows a quasi-structured analysis through a questionnaire with a series of "open" questions lead mostly from sociologists because they want in particular to pick many aspects in depth. On global level are diffused the observation and the focus group. Such techniques are very useful because they assure a language more narrow the final consumers and the intermediate customers. "I often find myself to use during the meeting some citations arisen from the focus groups. They concur to be closer to the consumers and customers cause they change our mind set and the shared cognitive scheme of the firm", as said the manager interviewed.

## 6. Conclusions, managerial implications and future research directions.

Relatively to product categories for which the emotional involvement of the consumer is very strong, and the product technology is quite homogenous among competing brands, the marketing innovation becomes primary source of competitive advantage. Many brands that compete in mature markets are trying to go beyond the search of new functional drivers for innovation, to advantage of those emotional and experiential ones. Therefore, in particular for the leading brands, a fine tuning of the innovative activities becomes a priority, but, more in general terms, of the shared cognitive scheme of the firm, with the lived life, experiences and emotions of the consumers, which demand a deep understanding of their needs. The generation and the testing of new insights therefore assume a primary role that it can lead to radical innovations in the way to conceive the needs of the customer, also of those more unconscious and latent ones, such as to manage the marketing mix variables. The case studies analysed in the paper, in particular Barilla SpA, have evidenced as the qualitative marketing research techniques assume an high importance, and in certain circumstances, are substitutive of the quantitative ones, in new product development process. As the case study Barilla has put in evidence, such techniques, in fact, permeate the process of new product development not only in the early phase - when they demand a more creative or inductive thought on the consumers for the generation of new ideas or insights - but also in much more advanced phase, where they are used for the test of the product concept, and in ultimate ones, where they can

be implemented for the pre and post product launch test.

The aim of this paper has been to explore the potentialities of a mix of qualitative research techniques for developing new knowledge and insights on the consumers, presenting the first findings of an ongoing research project. Totally, the field research has involved 12 product-service categories, whose customer insights have been analysed through three complementary qualitative market research techniques (focus group, personal experience narrative-telling story, sentence completion). The design of research includes the analysis of at least one case study for each of twelve product-service category surveyed. In this paper we have reported the findings on the customer insight just on four of twelve categories surveyed; also, they are synthesized the findings about the case studies of four leading firms, one for each category analysed. Therefore, the main limit of such paper is inherent to the peculiarity of the field-categories under investigation and the small qualitative empirical evidence on the consumer supported. In the near future the results of the empirical research on the other product-service categories inquired and case studies will be introduced to the attention of the scientific community in the opportune communication forms and channels. In perspective, also, the research design will include for the future the widening of the categories of product-service and the case studies of surveying, as the application of different exploratory techniques (i.e.: ethnography and Zmet) in order to verify value and limits of a possible wider set of such methodologies and to evidence their ability to support the innovation marketing processes of the firms.

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