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THE REGULARITIES OF INNOVATION – A MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

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The purpose of this paper is to implement the regularities of product innovation in the field of marketing. The article takes a look at the different understandings of the concept of marketing innovation and it states that although the innovation concept is widely discussed in marketing literature, it lacks one important element: the "missing link" is an analysis of the relation between product innovation and marketing innovation. The paper discusses the different patterns of innovation and points out that the marketing of a product category displays a similar evolution cycle. Using the dominant product-form analogy, the author presents his hypothesis about the existence of a dominant marketing mix. He argues that as the dominant *product* form emerges, it is accompanied by a dominant *marketing* form, and he states that such standardised marketing will dominate the scene until the next discontinuous innovation.

Key words: marketing innovation, new product development, marketing, dominant product, dominant marketing mix

Jel classification index: M31, O32

1. INTRODUCTION

There seems to be a general agreement among academics and practitioners that innovation is a key factor in market success. Nobody has ever questioned the idea that the importance of these functions is on the increase with the new market-condition characteristics of the turn of the millennium (Drucker 1985; Zairi 1995; Cooper 1998; Cumming 1998; Johne 1999; Poolton – Ismail 2000; Shepherd – Ahmed 2000; Johannessen et al. 2001). Such agreement is, however, far from being unanimous when we come to the definition of the concept, the scope of such an interpretation or to the innovation process. Relatively few authors have given attention to the interpretation of the regularities of innovation in the field of marketing, that is, innovation as a corporate process.

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2. THE CONCEPT OF MARKETING INNOVATION

In spite of the increasing theoretical and practical interest in the field, there is no consensus about how to define innovation in general and, in particular, how to define it related to marketing. The starting point of almost every definition of innovation is the concept of *newness*; and it is newness that distinguishes innovation from a simple change. The European Commission Green Paper defines innovation as follows: "the successful production, assimilation and exploitation of novelty in the economic and social spheres" (*European Commission 1995,* p. 9). When trying to define innovation in marketing, it is also useful to refer to the concept of newness. This concept, however, raises further questions, as did Johannessen et al. (2001) in the title of their study: "... what is new, how new, and new to whom?"

2.1. How new? — Continuity and discontinuity

Since innovation is closely related to the concept of newness, the analysis starts with the question "how new?" It is important to clarify the degree of newness because the concepts used to describe innovation both in theory and in practice will depend on this. Names and concepts, however, often overlap, are different and at times even misleading. Hart (1996) makes a distinction between development and innovation with regard to the degree of newness *(Figure 1)*.

Innovation $\xleftarrow[\text{Newness}]{\qquad\qquad}$ Development

Figure 1. The newness continuum

Miller and Morris (1999) distinguish *continuous* and *discontinuous* forms of innovation. Others use the terms *continuous* and *radical innovation* (Cooper 1998), or *incremental* and radical innovation (Johannessen et al. 2001), while some speak of *continuous* and *revolutionary innovation*. Radical innovation is also frequently referred to as a "breakthrough" (Waite et al. 1999). Zairi (1995), using the terms continuous and discontinuous innovation, considers the former the concept of a dynamically continuous innovation. Iványi and Hoffer (1999) argue that, nowadays, innovation should be considered to include not only basic changes, but also the smaller improvements of products still being manufactured or in formerly used technologies. In spite of this, they seem to believe that the *degrees* of newness should be classified, and they suggest the usage of the terms *fundamental* *innovations*, *development innovations* and *appearance innovations* for this purpose.

From a marketing perspective it seems useful to distinguish between a newness *based on old structures* and a newness breaking with the old and *presupposing new structures.* The reason for this is that the two types of novelty require different approaches from the set-up, both within a company and regarding the market – and they require different attitudes on the part of consumers, too. With this consideration in mind, the paper wishes to define and interpret continuous and discontinuous innovations in marketing.

Innovation can be defined as *continuous* if it builds on something already existing, and this way creating compatibility between the old and the new. Related to marketing, continuous innovation does not require a change in consumers' buying behaviour, or in user habits, as the function of the marketing mix utilised remains the same – except for the fact that it is more suitable for meeting consumer demand. "Continuous innovation occurs within the boundaries of this known world. It works when the future competitive requirements of customers can be met within existing industry structures, an existing competitive architecture" (Miller – Morris 1999, p. 4).

The typical feature of *discontinuous innovation* is breaking with the past, thus leading to a radical, revolutionary change. As Miller and Morris (1999) have argued, this kind of innovation "falls outside existing markets or market segments and, when successful, it extends and redefines the market, exposing new possibilities" (p. 6). In the case of products, this breaking with the past brings about a change in the "product–consumer" relationship (e.g. the difference between using a typewriter and a word processor). Breaking with the past will change the "product–other products" relationship as well. The innovative new product will not be compatible with the existing structure (e.g. the differences between a floppy disk and a compact disc). Referring to the new, information age, Dhebar (1994) mentions an additional form of "breaking with the past": the discontinuity of the "product–database" relationship. (In this case the newly developed software, operation system, etc. is not able to handle the previously created files, software or databases.) In more fashionable terms we can say that radical innovations redefine the market, that is, they change the existing market structure.

Due to the above-illustrated difficulties, the dissemination of entirely new product items may be slower than in the case of the novelties which do not break with the past. Literature abounds in works concerning the diffusion of innovations in the marketplace, though most of them are rooted in the book written by Rogers in 1962.

2.2 What is new? – The scope of marketing innovation

Determining the scope of interpretation of innovation as implemented in business is a rather controversial issue. A review of relevant literature shows that innovation is most frequently mentioned in relation to *products* and *technologies* (Cumming 1998). Marketing innovations belong to the group of *managerial innovations*. According to literature, technological and product innovations are separated from managerial ones because the two require different types and amounts of organisational resources for their successful implementation (Damanpour 1988). Technological innovations involve concrete, tangible changes to a product, service, or the production process; managerial innovations are more *indirectly* related to basic work activities: they require changes in the policies, rules, responsibilities, administrative processes or routines of the organisation concerned. While technological innovations involve changes in the physical environment, managerial ones take place within the social system of the organisation (Damanpour – Evan 1984).

This paper wishes to harmonise these different areas of innovation, for it is not only a product, a service or a technology, or perhaps an operation process that is able to break with the past – marketing can, as well. Taking marketing as a set of instruments that aim to bring certain products or services successfully onto a target market, we can then say that the combination of marketing and product innovations can be categorised according to the following grid *(Figure 2)*.

		The implemented marketing mix	
		New	Not new
The product or service	New	Product and marketing innovations combined (Product-related marketing innovation)	Product innovation
	Not new	Marketing-mix-related innovation	Not an innovation

Figure 2. The marketing- and product-innovation matrix

2.3. New to whom? — To the marketer or to the market?

Before discussing the categories of marketing innovations illustrated in *Figure 2*, it is useful to clarify the "new to whom?" query. When the first definitions of innovation were formulated, researchers solved the dilemma "new to whom?" in a relatively simple way, saying: "any idea, practice, or material artifact perceived to be new by the relevant unit of adoption" (Zalthalm et al. 1973, p. 10). Later another view began to gain ground regarding new products: a clear-cut distinction should be made between two "relevant units": the company which creates a new product, and the market which perceives the product or service as new. This approach would seem to be beyond question, although several authors argue (Johannessen et al. 2001) that this answer to the question "new to whom?" restricts the interpretation to the level of the products; they also believe that in the case of technological or process innovations the market should be replaced by the industry as the second relevant unit.

When it comes to the question "new to whom?" in the case of marketing innovations, it also seems wise to make clear interpretations of the two relevant parties. Instead of *manufacturer* (the creator of the new product) it is better to use the term *marketer,* i.e. *the company or a set of companies working together to introduce a product or service to the market*. The term *market* should also be narrowed to become a smaller, more precisely defined unit, i.e. *to the market of a given product category* or *to a well-identified, homogeneous part of the market, to a market segment.* Home delivery, for example, was not a marketing novelty in the case of many product categories, yet when it was first implemented in the retail selling of flowers, it could be regarded as real marketing innovation. It required new buying behaviour on the part of consumers, and the development of new skills and capacities on the part of growers and retailers.

3. CATEGORIES OF PRODUCT- AND MARKETING-INNOVATION COMBINATIONS

The grid laid out in *Figure 2* suggests that we differentiate between three categories of novelty in relation to products (services) and marketing activity:

(1) *Pure product innovation* – bringing new products to the market with the help of the existing marketing infrastructure and of marketing instruments and concepts already used, and which have proven successful in the marketing of other products. Pure product innovation may be successful especially in the case of discontinuous product innovations, i.e. which do not break with

the past. Practitioners and academics agree, however, that a considerable part of new product failures stems from there being a lack of an appropriate, new marketing concept. A newly designed marketing activity is capable of bringing new product forms into the limelight and making them successfully predominant. A good example for this may be the case of Xerox: the company recognised the importance of product innovation as early as the late 1960s, and in 1970 it established a research centre in Palo Alto. This centre developed a wide range of new product concepts, among others "Alto", the robust forerunner of today's PCs. This product incorporated within itself nearly all functions of PCs from nowadays: the mouse, windows, a graphic user interface, and text editing. Later, before anybody else, the centre developed the idea of the local area network and the laser printer. Nearly all of these innovations became successful in the market – though not for Xerox, but for companies like IBM, Novell, and Hewlett Packard. The reason for this was that Xerox did not pay attention to the developments of the market structure and it neglected to establish a new marketing strategy – as was later described satirically in the magazine Upside: "On the first day, Xerox PARC created the PC. On the second, it created the OS (operating system). The third, desktop publishing. The fourth, the key to laser printing. On the fifth day, it realised it had no marketing. On the sixth, it gazed deep into its navel. On the seventh, it gave everything away" (Miller – Morris 1999, pp. 57–58).

(2) *Combined marketing and product innovation*. When a product or service innovation of "breaking with the past"-type appears, the role of marketing is extremely complex. "How does one market and sell something that nobody has ever seen?" – this is the main question, for there are no former successful marketing experiences to rely on. The revolutionary new product is not unmistakably connected with earlier consumer demands or expectations, so previously successful marketing activities need not necessarily function in the same way.

In our day, it is the Internet-based companies that have to face similar difficulties. Waite et al. (1999) write that, in 1996, when the idea of TV via Internet first emerged, marketers believed it was a great opportunity for the United States: everybody had a television set, and use of the Internet was spreading rapidly. WebTV, a subsidiary company of Microsoft selling products under the same name, launched a huge advertising campaign with the support and marketing experience of the mother company. Yet in spite of considerable marketing investment, the results were devastating. After a short time, in 1997, Philips successfully introduced the so-called Magnavox system. Its success was attributed to a new marketing approach. Market research undertaken by Philips had revealed that the reason why consumers stayed away from WebTV was that they did not understand all the benefits it was offering them. It was also found that shop assistants also failed to spend enough time informing customers – it was easier for them to concentrate on selling well-known TV sets and camcorders. Philips started its campaign with giving information to potential consumers. It used advertisements, in which consumers themselves spoke about the advantages of the WebTV. And it was only then that it started to focus on a sales promotion. Philips *broke with traditional product marketing and introduced a so-called concept marketing instead*, where the main point is familiarising the potential market with a value concept pertaining to the product.

The launching of revolutionary new products generally requires marketing innovation to be successful in the market. While creating the marketing innovation, as happened with the development of the new products, marketing managers usually start developing new marketing concepts going in different directions – and after a period of experimenting with the different marketing approaches, one approach emerges as the most successful one, and in most cases it becomes the dominant one.

(3) The third box in *Figure 2* illustrates the pure marketing innovations called *marketing-mix-related innovations.* Such innovations are results of R&D activity within the marketing system. It is obvious that the aim of market research is not only the collecting and analysing of data in connection with demand and market trends – a researcher's job includes the finding and developing of new solutions to marketing problems, the discovery of new marketing instruments and/or the development of more efficient ways of using existing ones.

Marketing-mix-related type innovations can further be grouped into two categories: one including marketing innovations that revolutionise a part of the marketing system, and one that has the capacity to deal with different products or services. The distribution system provides a good illustrative example of marketing innovations leading to different existing products being brought to the market in a new way. Brockman and Morgan (1999), while referring to efficient consumer response (ECR) as the most recent managerial innovation within distribution, gave a comprehensive overview of the main innovative changes in the distribution system (see the following *table*).

Key managerial innovations in distribution

Time period	Innovation	Operational change
1900–1929	Vertically integrated systems:	(1) Wholesale activities performed by the retailer
	– Chain store (RD)	(2) Routinisation of transactions
	– Department store (RD) – Mail-order houses (RD)	(3) Merging of chain store, department store and mail-order houses
1930–1949	Self-service (R)	(1) Reduction in consumer services performed by retailer, scrambled merchandising (2) Increasing amount of wholesale activities performed by retailer
1950–1969	Contractually integrated marketing systems (MDR)	(1) Increased coordination efforts in both vertical and horizontal integration (2) Movement towards greater efficiency in replenishment efforts
1970–1989	JIT (MDR) Quick response (MDR)	(1) Increasing integration between channel players (2) Primary focus on efficiency in production and replenishment, and product and service quality
1990s	ECR (MDR)	(1) Primary focus still on efficiency in production and replenishment (2) Joint efforts to identify and provide market-demanded products (3) Movement towards improving the efficiency of promotional efforts

Note: The primary channel members involved in each innovation are indicated by the following classifications: R – retailer; D – distributor; M – manufacturer.

With reference to retailers, we are able to see innovations even within the inside setting and merchandising of retail outlets. For supermarkets, a retailer's need to maximise space and profitability was combined with the consumer's need for convenience. More recent expansions of clothing, entertainment and stationery products into a supermarket's merchandise mix have meant that consumers are now buying a much greater range of goods in a supermarket environment (Hart – Davies 1996; Newman – Cullen 2001).

The second type of marketing-mix-related innovation has developed one particular product category for the marketing world. Products and services that have been with us for some time can be marketed with a completely new combination of marketing tools, i.e. ones that are different from those used before. We can speak of innovation, for example, with the sale of books (see e.g. the study of Kim and Mauborgne (1999) on the success of the B&N bookstore chain); or use of the Internet in connection with café services; or when florists began to offer a home delivery service. It is possible that a marketing innovation redefines the market with the use of already well-known products, too – and there is a host of Japanese examples to illustrate this. Small, 50cc motorcycles have been available for more than 40 years – Suzuki, however, redefined the market when it started selling large volumes of its high-quality scooters at a reasonable price.

4. THE REGULARITIES OF MARKETING INNOVATIONS – THE EMERGENCE OF THE DOMINANT MARKETING MIX

The hypothesis of this study is that marketing innovations have regularities that are very similar to innovations implemented in the tangible (product or technology) sphere of business. A historical analysis of the innovations implemented in various product categories has allowed researchers to establish a pattern of regularities of tangible innovations, according to which relatively small numbers of revolutionary, discontinuous innovations are connected by a series of continuous innovations or developments. Utterback (1995) used the examples of photography, lighting and typing to illustrate this innovative development. With photography: daguerreotype – ferrotype – glass plate method – dry plate method – celluloid film – electronic photography, as regards lighting: candle and oil lamp – gas light – electric bulb – fluorescent light, and the development of the process of typing was typewriter – electric typewriter – word processor – PC with word processor. Based on the observations of technological evolution researchers (Abernathy – Utterback 1978; Moore – Pessemier 1993; Miller – Morris 1999), we can distinguish three stages of innovative development here:

– the fluid stage of innovation;
– the emergence of the dominant product form; and
– the transition stage of innovations.

Innovations typical of the first stage are described as the "*fluid type*"; this is the stage of *revolutionary product innovations*. The fact that the new product is far from being perfect at the time it is launched onto the market inspires a host of *subsequent developments*. These developments often focus on quite different varieties of the same products, because at the time the product is launched, consumers' value expectations with regard to the revolutionary new product are not as yet crystallised.

A result of the experiments and developments occurring in the fluid stage is that *the dominant design of the product takes shape* in the vast majority of cases. This is an optimal combination of the value components, which serves to define the product category in question. This form becomes constant and remains unchanged as to its main characteristics for a relatively long time. Consequently, the dominant product form is not the direct result of some revolutionary innovation: it is, rather, the final output of the initial innovation and the subsequent evolution. These dominant products were later used as the starting points for *further* developments, and they set the trends in their product category for several decades.

The finalisation of the dominant product form might then induce manufacturers to turn their attention away from product innovation to *technology and process innovation.* By this time the dominant product has already become popular in the market, sold in large quantities, and manufacturers cannot expect an increase in profits without rationalising production, i.e. manufacturing on a large scale. This stage is therefore marked by *revolutionary new technology and process innovations,* with *the product and the technology/operation process having become interdependent.*

The emergence of the dominant product form and the interdependence of the product and the technology is followed by a new stage, one which is characterised by lots of continuous innovations, complementary, incremental, or additional developments. These developments, however, neither change the basic qualities of the product, nor of the technology. Technology serves in the mass-production process and becomes capital-intensive and inflexible, allowing only a limited development.

Returning now to the regularities of marketing innovations, the analysis of current business practices proves that both in the case of "product-related marketing innovations" and "pure marketing-related innovations" the emergence of a dominant marketing form can be witnessed. *A dominant marketing form means a strong resemblance between the marketing-mix tools applied in an identical or very similar manner.*

The process of the innovation cycle in marketing has many similarities with the tangible goods-innovation process *(Figure 3)*:

– It starts with an idea or invention of a new, discontinuous marketing concept. The development of this concept may go in different directions, and can appear in different forms.
– After a while, one of these forms becomes dominant. Many companies start to implement the same marketing concept, involving the same marketing-mix elements and using them in a similar way.
– When the dominant marketing form appears, company attention is focused on "technology" and on the "process" of this dominant marketing concept. Marketing activity is also exposed to economies of scale. The increasing efficiency

of marketing technology requires standardisation, improvements in the creating process and in the use of the means of marketing. Innovations in "marketing technology" are strongly connected to the dominant marketing form. As in the case of tangible products, the dominant marketing form and the technology will become interdependent.

– In the third stage, additional developments are characteristic of the marketing innovation cycle; and these incremental improvements may be aimed at the concept itself, as well as at its technology.

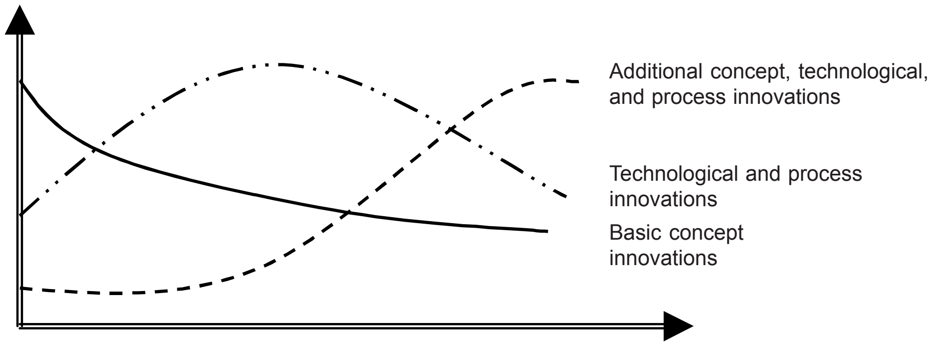

Figure 3. Development model of marketing innovations

The dominant marketing form applies to all means of marketing. Yet it is not as simple to prove this hypothesis as is the case with products, i.e. where "technical functions" are relatively easy to compare. As to the dominant marketing form, proof can rather be found through studying the everyday practice of marketing – a few examples of which will be presented in the followings.

Product policy includes marketing tools closely related to the product: for example packaging, design, colour, warranty, etc. The dominant functional benefit of a product can be presented in quite different forms (designs). Looking back at the historical developments of some product categories, it can be observed that a few dominant forms of packaging are more outstanding than others. Let us take the example of the dairy products or soft drinks: milk was first sold in cans, then in bottles, later in plastic bags and more recently in special carton boxes. The latter has become the dominant form by our days. There was, however, some development even within this latter form: in the beginning the boxes were of several shapes (e.g. cylindrical), but gradually the brick form became dominant, because it engages less space in the refrigerator. Similar development trends could be observed in the case of soft drinks: here again the most suitable forms of packaging have become dominant, e.g. bottles, boxes or plastic bottles. Some solutions have become dominant even in the technology, related to the opening of the packages (just compare the way soft drink bottles were opened 10 years ago and today).

As to the design part, the emergence of the dominant colours can be observed. In entertainment electronics we have had both black and silver, but now the colour of titanium seems to be the dominant one. Fashion itself can be defined as the ruling of the dominant form between two fashion innovations (with the difference that the life-cycle of the dominant forms in fashion is considerably shorter).

The emergence of dominant forms can be observed in the case of services as well. For example, at fuel stations fuel is offered in a dominant form of service: regardless of calling at MOL, Aral, OMV or Shell, we have the same offer (self-service, car-wash, shop, etc.). The dominant form is also present in the internal services of hotel rooms in the same category: whichever hotel we stay in, the same services are available, often even in the same form. Or let us see the warranty conditions offered by car manufacturers. The Japanese firms used a marketing innovation that is becoming more and more dominant nowadays: warranty for three years or 100,000 km.

In the case of product-policy tools, the dominant form is simply the standardisation of the expected product (see the description of product levels described by Levitt (1980): the generic product – the expected product – the augmented product). The packaging, design, colour, and warranty etc. of the product will remain dominant until a new marketing innovation creates a new standard. In the period between two innovations continuous improvement, modernisation is going on, as proved by the experiences.

Price of products and services. Although the price of a product can least be subject to standardisation, in globalised competition a continuous convergence in the price levels is witnessed; within the same product category there is a dominant price for the identical value, and the prices of the products are dispersed around it – although to a lesser degree nowadays, due to the increasing transparency of supply in the "new economy". The price forms can also become dominant: in the information and communication industries characterised by high fixed costs, for example, *price bundling, two-part tariffs, or two-block tariffs* (Dolan – Simon 1996) tend to become dominant. In the case of mass retailers the EDLP-formula (every day low price) – first used by Wal-Mart – is on the way to become dominant.

Distribution – distribution channels. Getting the products and services to reach the ultimate consumer is a function of fundamental importance for marketing. The review of practice in this field reveals that dominant forms related to a particular product appear in the forms and methods of distribution as well. The question is whether this dominant form develops according to the manufacturer's expectation or he is forced to accept it by the stronger distribution system. Manufacturers in a strong position make efforts to keep their distribution channels under control as much as possible, and sell their products through a network of their own, or in the form of franchise, which they can also control. The emergence of a dominant form can be observed here, too. Innovation related to the channel of distribution is copied by the others and the particular form becomes dominant. A good example for this is Suzuki, which was the first to introduce the specialised (exclusive) dealer network in the United States, at a time when the Suzuki Samurai was launched on the market. Since then practically all the car manufacturers have sold their products in this form.

The same has been observed in the market of FMCGs (fast moving consumer goods) – especially in the oligopolistic markets – where the merchandising innovation employed by one manufacturer is immediately copied by the others, raising it the dominant form. Another important element in shaping the dominant forms of distribution is the emergence of multinational mass retailing. It is frequently seen that the distribution of certain product groups takes place in practically the same way from the procurement conditions through the display of the products to the forms of selling, sometimes even to the specific actions used for the product group in question.

In the field of *marketing communication* the dominant forms are also gaining ground. Products within the same product group are supported with similar advertisement messages, style and even campaigns. This similarity is even more striking when occurring in different areas of sales promotion, like the similarity of actions, price cuts, POS materials, etc.

5. CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The paper attempted to demonstrate that a combined analysis of marketing and product innovations is essential and can result in different outcomes in terms of marketing or product "newness". In this context the study distinguished two types of marketing innovation. The first is product-related marketing innovation, in the case of which it is important to understand that discontinuous product innovations in their commercialisation process require a new marketing concept, i.e. a new approach in the marketing mix used. The analysis of new product failures proves that unsuccessful market introduction is in most cases due to not well-chosen marketing instruments. The managerial implication arising from the above is that R&D and marketing managers should integrate their efforts to combine product and marketing innovations when bringing new products into the market.

The second type of marketing innovation is stemming from the evolution of marketing itself. The development of distribution systems provides good examples of this type of marketing newness, that is, marketing-mix-related innovation. The existence of a "pure" marketing innovation implies that when one is formulating the product (and service) offerings of a manufacturer, emphasis should be put on adapting the offer to the requirements of the new marketing possibilities and opportunities.

In analysing marketing innovations this paper argued that the evolution cycle of these displays a very similar pattern to that pertaining to *product* innovation. Using an analogy of the emergence of a dominant product form, it is safe to say here that soon after a new marketing concept has been created, one among the different directions eventually become "fixed", and predominant. This dominant marketing mix then sets the standard for a long time in the given product category or in the given field of marketing activity – and those marketing persons who find it difficult to adjust to this dominant marketing form, cannot expect any considerable success on the market. This does not mean, however, that a chance of continual improvement or modernisation is being excluded here – on the contrary, additional, incremental developments like these mean that the dominant marketing mix is constantly being amended, changed and improved upon.

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